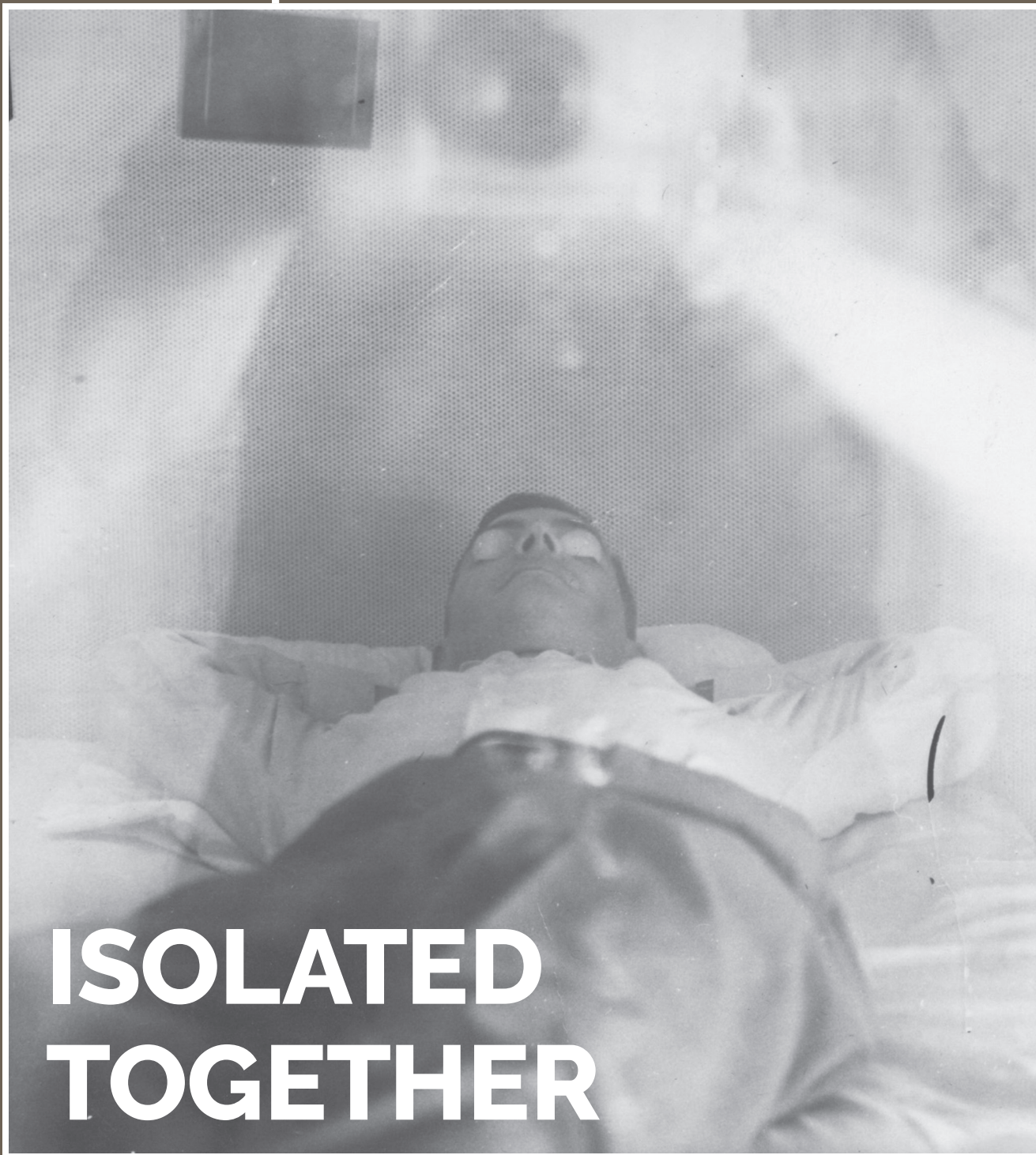


The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY

Volume 59: 3
March 2021



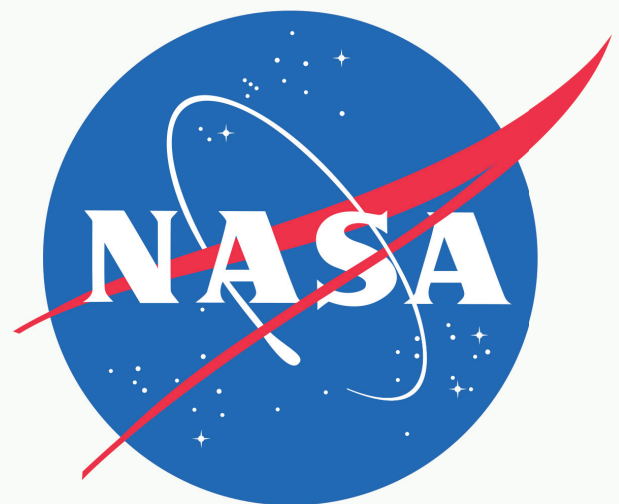
ISOLATED TOGETHER

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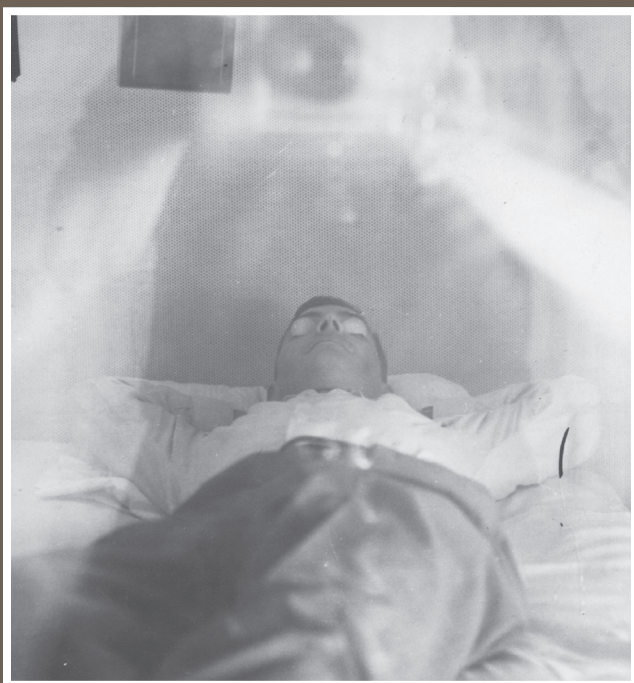
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Data from 2018–19 Show Lowest Number since 1980

ROBERT B. TOWNSEND



ON THE COVER

As of March 2021, most *Perspectives* readers will have been social distancing, wearing masks, and taking other precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19 for a full year. In “American Solitude: Notes Toward a History of Isolation,” Jeffrey Mathias discusses mid-20th-century isolation studies conducted by psychologists and US military and space scientists. He describes the sensation of living through “an apocalypse not yet arrived and yet unending.” Yet even in isolation, we are rarely truly alone. AHA staff Emily Swafford and Sarah Jones Weicksel report on how the Association used new technologies and started new projects to connect historians while “Confronting a Pandemic.”

Collection of Robert R. Holt, courtesy of the Holt family

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ASHLEY E. BOWEN

TOWNHOUSE NOTES

The Shoulder We Cry On

In the days after a mob stormed the US Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the results of a fair and legal election, there was a brief flurry of interest in one of the Capitol complex's lesser-known statues: the 1878 Peace Monument. This statue, standing on the western side of the building at Pennsylvania Avenue and First Street NW, was sculpted by Franklin Simmons to commemorate naval deaths at sea during the US Civil War. Atop the monument are two female figures, both in classical robes. Grief weeps and rests her head on History's shoulder. History, meanwhile, looks at the stylus and tablet she holds, inscribed with the words "They died that their country might live." It is a cold comfort that History offers Grief in this statue, one predicated on the promise that events and people will not be forgotten in the future rather than connecting Grief to the past. In this statue, history's work is future facing, not backward looking.

Historians have been in the position of providing context as well as offering comfort, some sense that we have endured these kinds of crises in the past and come out the other side. Most historians were quick to point out that, in fact, the events at the Capitol on January 6 were not unprecedented in world history (though, perhaps unsurprisingly, we could not agree on the relevant precedents). Throughout COVID-19, historians of medicine have reminded us that we are not experiencing the first, or even the deadliest, pandemic. Labor historians have explained that although this recession is unique in many respects, what working people are experiencing is the product of a series of decisions over generations. I take great personal comfort in knowing that "we are not alone across time" (to quote Bryan Doerries, founder of Theater of War). We turn to history during periods of grief because history holds us in a community of people who survived.

Despite that sense of continuity, it is not history's primary job to provide comfort in times of crisis or solace in times

of anxiety. Historians offer context and nuance in times when those things are in short supply, often asking us to check our assumptions and refine our critiques. Sometimes, that context can be comforting, but more often, it is uncomfortable because contextualization belies the comforts of precedent. At its best, history asks us to face difficult, complex, and sometimes conflicting truths and confront how those truths reverberate in the present. That can be enlightening and distressing at the same time. Many people will turn away from history when it challenges fundamental beliefs about a nation or a people. Or they will simply work to distort the historical record, cherry-picking evidence and interpretations that align with a specific worldview, often in order to create a legitimating precedent. When she appears as a truth teller, rather than a shoulder to cry on, History is much more difficult to love.

Of course, history is the product of historians. It is not a robed woman waiting to lecture us or prop us up; it is neither self-evident nor carved into stone. Instead, as explained in the AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*, "history is the never-ending process whereby people seek to understand the past and its many meanings." It is through a "critical dialogue—with each other, with the wider public, and with the historical record—in which we explore former lives and diverse worlds in search of answers to the most compelling questions of our own time and place." After the last year, I might add that this critical dialogue also connects us to each other as individuals as much as professionals. When we turn toward our work as historians during a moment of crisis we are, in essence, turning toward this conversation. There is comfort in that. **P**

Ashley E. Bowen is editor of Perspectives on History. She tweets @AEBowenPhD.



Recently Published Online in *Perspectives Daily*

Is There Life in Outer Space?

Dana Burton

In the 1970s, NASA explored how to handle the discovery of life in outer space.

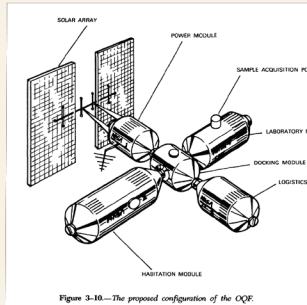


Figure 3-10.—The proposed configuration of the OQF.

NASA Archives

Please Stop Calling Things Archives

B. M. Watson

What do historians mean when they say "archive"? One archivist makes the case for a more precise use of the word.

Remote Reflections: Writing a Dissertation during the Pandemic

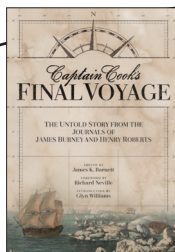
Tiana Wilson

History graduate students working on dissertations during a pandemic must prioritize flexibility, creativity, and collectivity.

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ILLUMINATING WESTERN HISTORY

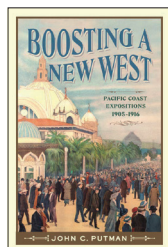


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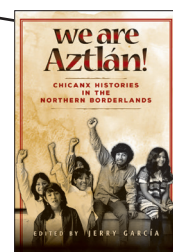
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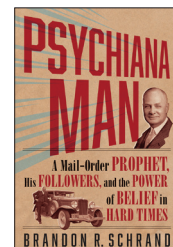


Psychiana Man

A Mail-Order Prophet, His Followers, and the Power of Belief in Hard Times
Brandon R. Schrand

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JACQUELINE JONES

THE “FUN” IN FUNDRAISING

Visiting Committees Can Boost History Departments’ Work



If you have made it past the title of this piece, congratulations! I confess that if presented with an article dealing with this issue a few years ago, I would have rolled my eyes and turned the page—quickly. The term *fundraising* evoked images of tedious rubber-chicken dinners and awkward conversations with well-heeled donors, and brought to mind silent pleas of “Get me out of here.” Yet raising money for history programs can be rewarding, in several meanings of the word.

As we look forward to fall 2021 and hopefully the return of in-person teaching, events, and exhibitions, it is time to consider how various units related to our discipline might enhance their revenue. In an era of constricted budgets, bringing in additional funds can make a big difference. My experiences with the University of Texas at Austin History Visiting Committee might provide a useful example for other history departments.

There are multiple approaches to fundraising, all of them useful in their own ways. An organization need not possess substantial resources in terms of either staff time or money in order to raise modest sums and appeal to a donor base with a general interest in history. That interest exists virtually everywhere, especially as it relates to local and family history and current events. Even nonacademics who study or read voraciously about a specific topic—such as the Founders or World War II—often demonstrate a keen interest in all kinds of subjects outside their particular interest.

First, some words of caution. Any fundraising plan must receive the approval—and ideally, the robust support—of the institution’s development office. Although some development offices discourage or even prohibit individual units from fundraising on their own, others simply require that they be kept apprised of a department’s activities. Raising funds at the departmental level is often more successful than institutional-level solicitations because

some alumni who refuse to give a penny to their alma mater generally have warmer feelings toward a particular department. Some alumni remember a beloved professor as someone who changed their life or otherwise inspired them in some way. Some met their current partners in a history class. And some who went on to pursue careers far afield from history yearn to return to learning about and debating the meaning of the past. It is in an institution’s interest to tap into an alum’s particular devotion to the historical enterprise. Development offices can also be on the lookout for alumni and other donors who indicate a passion for history, encouraging them to get involved or keep in touch with the department. In the end, departments should always coordinate with their development office, whether or not that office actually lends tangible support to the fundraising effort.

There are multiple approaches
to fundraising, all of them
useful in their own ways.

Raising money includes several components, but for many community members and alumni, intellectual stimulation is a big, if not the biggest, part of the draw. People outside the academy often appreciate the give-and-take of discussions focused on historical evidence and methodologies, and they enjoy learning about not only what happened in the past, but how historians grapple with issues of interpretation. A first step, then, would be keeping track of who from the general public or outside the unit attends lectures and other presentations sponsored by the unit.

In recent years, my department at UT Austin has capitalized on this broader interest in history and emotional connection to the department. In 2008, the department convened a visiting committee (VC) consisting

of about 20 individuals recommended by faculty colleagues, alumni, and the university's development office. The committee has been active in starting a group of donors, the Friends of History/UT Austin, sponsoring special events such as an annual History Homecoming tailgate and celebrating the department. With the explicit missions of raising money for the department and promoting its interests, the VC is akin to an athletic department booster group.

An aside here about what the visiting committee is *not*: The committee neither makes policy nor advises on curricular or governance matters. Like an athletic booster group or the "friends" entities that exist to support libraries and museums, a department visiting committee exists solely to build enthusiasm for our department and to raise funds to support our work.

The Visiting Committee is akin to an athletic department booster group.


Members of the VC and people in the surrounding Austin community have responded enthusiastically to various events organized by the department and its Institute for Historical Studies and designed to appeal to a broad audience. Panels marking the anniversary of historical events (including the Protestant Reformation, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the Vietnam War) have been especially popular. We can count on graduate students to offer fascinating glimpses into the nitty-gritty of historical research with their "Adventures in the Archives" presentations, in which they describe the challenges of navigating library and archives protocols all over the world, while seeking to adjust to the cultures in which the repositories are embedded. Visitors to the department have also enjoyed hearing from history majors who hold leadership positions at UT (for example, the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper) or have made news themselves (an organizer of protests against the state law permitting concealed carry of weapons on campus). VC members often marvel at the ways these different approaches to the study and presentation of history depart from the traditional lectures they heard as undergraduates. They also seem keen to learn about what goes on "behind the scenes" in the history enterprise—for example, how historians write their books and relate their own research specialties to teaching.

VCs and other interested groups of nonacademic historians might raise money for things included on an organization's

wish list; we were able to install in the department's foyer a monitor that shows a rotating carousel of announcements. Members of VCs might reach out to their friends and invite them to events. Large, active VCs endow chairs and graduate scholarships, and they encourage their members and others to provide planned and estate gifts that will one day benefit the history department.

To some extent, all of these fundraising ideas depend on a sizable contingent of history lovers in close proximity to campus. At the same time, an e-newsletter that touts the department's achievements can prompt a certain level of engagement among alumni who live far away. E-newsletters announcing upcoming events and listing faculty members' recent publications and students' recent research projects and dissertations will find a ready audience among friends of history. Never underestimate the enthusiasm of your former students and their willingness to get and stay involved in the department in a way that benefits you both.

One final note: History faculty are not responsible for asking donors for gifts. That responsibility usually lies with the VC, the institution's development officer, or sometimes a dean, although there are department chairs who have "done the ask" successfully (the AHA can put you in touch with these colleagues).

Raising money can be a personally and intellectually rewarding enterprise for all involved, and a much-needed source of revenue for history departments and other places where historians work. Faculty and students can best contribute to any fundraising effort by talking about what they know best—their own disciplinary specialty, history, how to do it, and what it tells us about the world we are living in today. 

Jacqueline Jones is president of the AHA.

JAMES GROSSMAN

A PARADOX

History without Historians



I'm wrestling with a dilemma, a paradox. Media, social and otherwise, want to know why history has seemingly lost status in higher education. Majors are declining; enrollments have stabilized unevenly across institutions. Departments are being consolidated and losing positions as chairs are told to tighten their belts.

At the same time, history itself—along with history education and the public commemoration of historical events—pervades these same media, the focus of battles over the very essence and future of the United States. The already iconic photographs from the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol reek of history: medieval imagery, the 1775 Gadsden flag, abundant Confederate emblems. Reporters ask historians whether 1619 or 1776 holds the key to our national identity, or why state legislators have disparaged a particular set of curricula and introduced bills that list forbidden concepts, topics, and perspectives.

The controversy generating the most attention of late is the already infamous “Report from the President’s Advisory 1776 Commission,” issued on the penultimate full day of the Trump administration. After President Biden quickly withdrew the report and disbanded the commission, many journalists and historians breathed sighs of relief; surely this was the end of the matter. But the report lives on, not only in the National Archives as an official document, but also on the Heritage Foundation website as part of an attack on academic historians and the *New York Times* and Pulitzer Center’s 1619 Project Curriculum. As one journalist told me, one commission member has made it clear that she “wants school boards and students to read the report,” and that “the deactivated commission still plans to meet and rework the report.”

The 1776 Commission is not yet dead. I fear seeing the report put to use, zombie-like, to delegitimize the work of professional historians while activists and legislators work—as boosters or propagandists, *not* as historians—to influence local history education. This is already brewing in at least three

state legislatures (Arkansas, Iowa, and Oklahoma), with bills in the hopper that aim to purge teaching materials of “divisive concepts.” Consider proposed legislation in Arkansas:

A public school shall not allow a course, class, event, or activity within its program of instruction that: Promotes the overthrow of the United States Government; Promotes division between, resentment of, or social justice for a: (A) Race; (B) Gender; (C) Political affiliation; (D) Social class; or (E) Particular class of people.

The AHA’s statement on the 1776 Commission report, printed below, articulates what is at stake. Although the immediate target of the commission, the president who appointed it, and its allies in state legislatures is the 1619 Project, the broader and more enduring goal is to perpetuate celebratory myths of a nation whose essence lies in extremely limited government and cultural homogeneity. They want neither to confront our past nor learn from it.

In the context of the current fixation on the 1619 Project, it is not merely the question of whether 1619 or 1776 represents the nation’s “founding.” It is a matter of whether one can understand documents written by slaveholders in the late 18th century without understanding their world—one in which humans had owned, bought, and sold other humans for nearly two centuries.

Historians know this, including those who have identified flaws in the 1619 Project. But the proponents of a history that marginalizes slavery and its aftermath while denying the deep and continuing impact of racism on nearly all aspects of American life would rather not have historians at the table. There were no professional historians of the United States on the 1776 Commission. Nor were any historians consulted by the San Francisco Board of Education in advance of its recent decision to rename 44 public schools. The chair of the school “renaming committee” believes historians themselves to be

both troublesome (here's that paradox again) and irrelevant. "What would be the point?" in consulting a historian, he asked. "History is written and documented pretty well across the board. And so, we don't need to belabor history in that regard. . . . Based on our criteria, it's a very straightforward conversation. And so, no need to bring historians forward to say—they either pontificate and list a bunch of reasons why, or [say] they had great qualities. Neither are necessary in this discussion."

These controversies are by no means equivalent. What happened in San Francisco is unusual, an extreme case, in

the battles over naming. But in its details can be found a call to action for historians, to be aware of what is happening not only in our state legislatures, but in our communities and school boards—indeed all those civic associations that Alexis de Tocqueville so admired—and to show up, perhaps even to join the table without a special invitation. We cannot heal this nation without accurately understanding its pathologies, which are by their very nature historical. **P**

James Grossman is executive director of the AHA. He tweets @JimGrossmanAHA.

AHA Condemns Report of the Advisory 1776 Commission

The just-released "1776 Report" claims that common understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution can unify all Americans in the love of country. The product of "The President's Advisory 1776 Commission," the report focuses on these founding documents in an apparent attempt to reject recent efforts to understand the multiple ways the institution of slavery shaped our nation's history. The authors call for a form of government indoctrination of American students, and in the process elevate ignorance about the past to a civic virtue.

The report actually consists of two main themes. One is an homage to the Founding Fathers, a simplistic interpretation that relies on falsehoods, inaccuracies, omissions, and misleading statements. The other is a screed against a half-century of historical scholarship, presented largely as a series of caricatures, using single examples (most notably the "1619 Project") to represent broader historiographical trends.

The sections on the founders envision godlike men who crafted documents that asserted "universal and eternal principles of justice and political legitimacy." Ironically, the report erases whole swaths of the American population—enslaved people, Indigenous communities, and women—the way the founders excluded those groups from the body politic in a wide variety of founding documents as well as actual public practice. In listing threats to the ideals of the nation, the report ignores the Confederate States of America, whose leaders, many clearly guilty of treason, initiated a civil war that claimed more than 700,000 lives—more American lives than all other conflicts in the history of the country combined. Instead, the authors focus on early 20th-century Progressive reformers and bizarrely suggest they were similar to Mussolini and other World War II

European fascists. Of particular note is the implied condemnation of Progressive Era legislation—workplace health and safety legislation, regulation of the production of food and drugs, the elimination of child labor, and other social goods we take for granted today.

The report concludes with a full-throated assault on American universities, which, the authors claim, have produced what they call "deliberately destructive scholarship." This scholarship is described as the "intellectual force behind so much of the violence in our cities," including the "defamation of our treasured national statues." The vast majority of targeted statues, as the AHA has noted before, honor either men who committed treason by violating oaths of office and taking up arms against the United States government, or whose main historical significance lay in their defense of slavery or other forms of white supremacy.

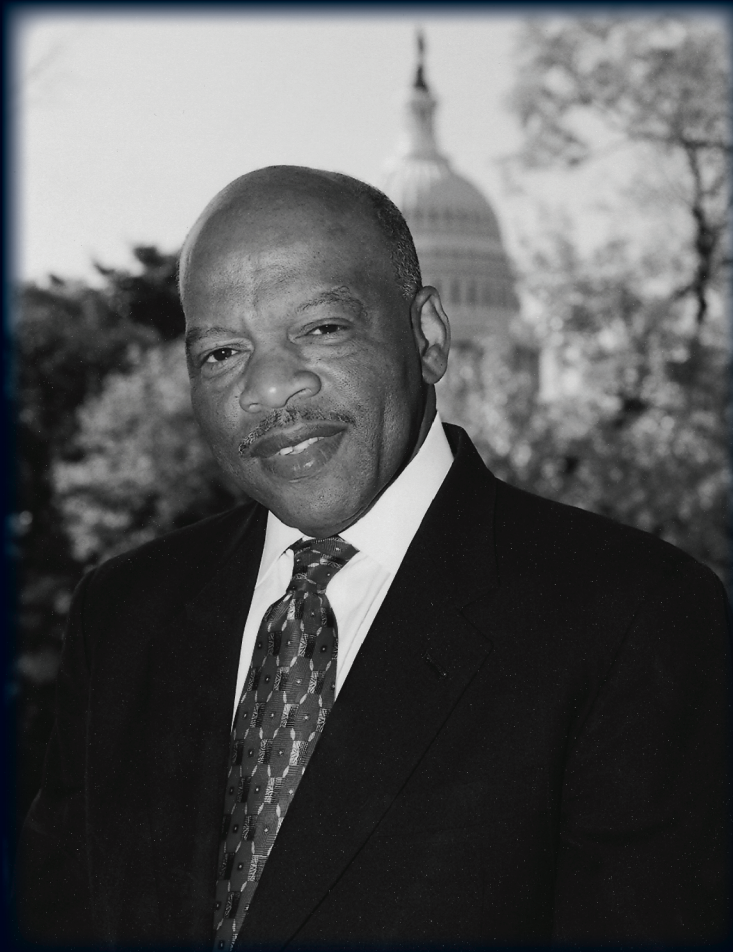
Written hastily in one month after two desultory and tendentious "hearings," without any consultation with professional historians of the United States, the report fails to engage a rich and vibrant body of scholarship that has evolved over the last seven decades. Americans across the nation, perhaps including some of the commissioners, have encountered this history not only in books and classrooms, but also at museums, in national parks, and even in their homes as they watch documentaries.

Though it extols (narrowly defined) family and faith as the ultimate forces for good, the "1776 Report" also observes that the "bedrock upon which the American political system is built is the rule of law." Yet its condemnation of contemporary social movements ignores recent efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the very institutions enshrined in the Constitution itself.

The AHA Council approved this statement on January 20, 2021.

Introducing the John Lewis Awards from the American Historical Association

*Thanks to a generous
donation from
the Agentives Fund*



John Lewis Award for Public Service to the Discipline of History

Established in 2021, the prize is offered annually to recognize individuals outside the ranks of professional historians who have made a significant contribution to the study, teaching, and public understanding of history, in the interest of social justice. The prize is named in memory of John Lewis (1940–2020), civil rights leader who served in the United States House of Representatives and who advanced the cause of social justice by “simultaneously reminding Americans of our history and challenging us to build on it to make the nation better.” The prize replaces the Association’s Roosevelt-Wilson Award for Public Service, which was presented to Congressman Lewis in 2006.

Nominations must be submitted by April 1, 2021.

John Lewis Award for History and Social Justice

Established in 2021, the prize is offered annually to recognize a historian for leadership and sustained engagement at the intersection of historical work and social justice. The prize is named in memory of John Lewis (1940–2020), civil rights leader who served in the United States House of Representatives and who advanced the cause of social justice by “simultaneously reminding Americans of our history and challenging us to build on it to make the nation better.”

Nominations must be submitted by May 15, 2021.

For more information, visit historians.org/prizes

AS MANY VOICES AS POSSIBLE

Writing a Community History of the Black Experience

It's difficult to cover the long span of American history in a single volume. To start, an author has to decide when "American history" begins—with Indigenous people who lived in North America before European colonization? With the establishment of permanent colonies like the Spanish St. Augustine, Florida, or the British Jamestown, Virginia? Or, as the *New York Times*' "1619 Project" has argued, does the arrival of enslaved Africans on the continent mark a specific turning point?

With *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619–2019* (One World), historians Ibram X. Kendi (Boston Univ.) and Keisha N. Blain (Univ. of Pittsburgh) use this arrival as the starting point for a massive new project. Spanning 400 years of history and including contributions from 90 writers, *Four Hundred Souls* considers the place of African American history from the arrival of Black Africans on the North American continent through the Obama administration and beyond. Eighty writers contributed brief essays covering 5-year periods, with 10 poets writing pieces about 40-year periods. With such a mission, it's surprising that the volume comes in at just 528 pages.

Perspectives spoke with co-editor Blain about how this volume came together. Blain and Kendi have worked together

on projects since 2016, as editors in the early days of the *Black Perspectives* blog and as co-authors of various op-eds. Kendi first approached Blain with the idea to commemorate the 400-year anniversary of African captivity in late 2018 and asked her to collaborate on the project. She jumped on board immediately, and they worked quickly to draft a book proposal and sketch out a plan for such a challenging project. Because they knew they wanted to reach a general, nonacademic audience, the pair approached editor Chris Jackson at One World, an imprint of Random House. Kendi had worked with Jackson on his best seller *How to Be an Antiracist*, and the pair knew that One World would steward the project well.

It was important to Kendi and Blain to include the voices of many writers—and not just historians.

From the beginning, the "community history" aspect was important to both editors. As Blain said, "We could have decided to simply write a book about the history of Black America—and I think we could have pulled it off quite well. However, that model would not have represented the spirit of community we envisioned." It was important to Blain and Kendi to include the voices of many

writers—and not just historians. "Community history is fundamentally about allowing members of the community to drive the narrative. In order to truly tell a community history, we needed to weave in as many voices as possible, and from as many perspectives as possible," she said.

The book's 90 Black contributors include "well-known Black intellectuals but also the next generation of talented, up-and-coming writers," as Blain explained. There are academics working in African and African American studies, economics, education, history, law, literature, philosophy, and other fields, alongside activists, journalists, novelists, and clergy. Nikole Hannah-Jones, originator of the *New York Times*' "1619 Project," opens the book with an essay titled "Arrival." Reverend William J. Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign and organizer of the Moral Mondays protests in North Carolina, writes about David George and Black Christianity of the 18th century. The US Constitution is covered by Donna Brazile, political strategist and twice acting chair of the Democratic National Convention. Angela Davis authors an essay on the 1994 Crime Bill. From Kiese Laymon and Isabel Wilkerson to Ijeoma Oluo, readers will recognize many writers, particularly since the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 sent many books on Black life and history to the top of best-seller lists.

As Blain described it, “These writers explore their respective periods through historical essays, short stories, personal vignettes, and fiery polemics, to give us a history that firmly pushes back on the idea of Black America as a monolith.” Importantly, Kendi and Blain made it a priority for women to make up a majority of contributors “as a reflection of the central roles Black women play in leading social movements today.” Reflecting this, the final essay in the volume, covering 2014–19, is written by Alicia Garza, co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter.

A community history must include the entire community.

Anyone who has edited an essay collection will marvel at the scope of this project and the sheer number of authors that Kendi and Blain wrangled for this volume. Blain described their fast-moving process, which started in 2018: “We shared our ideas and visions for which topics we would cover and which writers we would approach. Once we agreed on a contributor for a specific topic, we moved quickly to secure a commitment from them. We began to bring the project together in stages—largely working chronologically (section by section).” Generally, writers had between six and nine months to write their piece, and the editors built staggered deadlines for each section into the process. This allowed them to work on about 10 pieces at a time, submitting each section to their editor as they finished.

The writers were given clear guidance on what Kendi and Blain wanted for the essays. “We initially envisioned the pieces as op-eds,” Blain explained, and most of them run about three to four pages in print. By prioritizing readability and accessibility, the editors hoped “that

the book would be a nice introduction for someone who had little (or no) knowledge of African American history.” Plus, such short pieces are ideal for teaching and “give educators a bit of flexibility and space to assign complementary texts or use the essays as stand-alone pieces to facilitate in-class conversations.”

Perspectives also spoke with several contributors to the volume, who reflected on their contributions to this community history. Jennifer L. Morgan (New York Univ.), a historian of the Atlantic World, focused her essay on Elizabeth Keye, a figure who may be unfamiliar to the nonexpert but whose life helped to shape enslavement in British America. Born and raised in 17th-century colonial Virginia, Keye was the daughter of an enslaved Black woman and her white

owner. As Morgan told *Perspectives*, “Keye had thrown the Virginia governing body into turmoil by claiming that, because her father was white and free, she should be as well.” In 1656, she successfully petitioned the colony’s general assembly for freedom—but just a few years later, the legislature would declare that all children born to enslaved mothers would also be enslaved. Keye’s story encapsulates how women and sexuality are central to the history of African America. Their stories cannot be minimized or ignored in favor of big societal issues such as politics or war. “Whether we look at the agony of black women unable to prevent medical personnel from experimenting on their bodies both during the slavery period and well into the 20th century, or to protect their children from violence at the hands of



“The Savoy” by Dayton Brandfield, created as part of the Works Progress Administration.

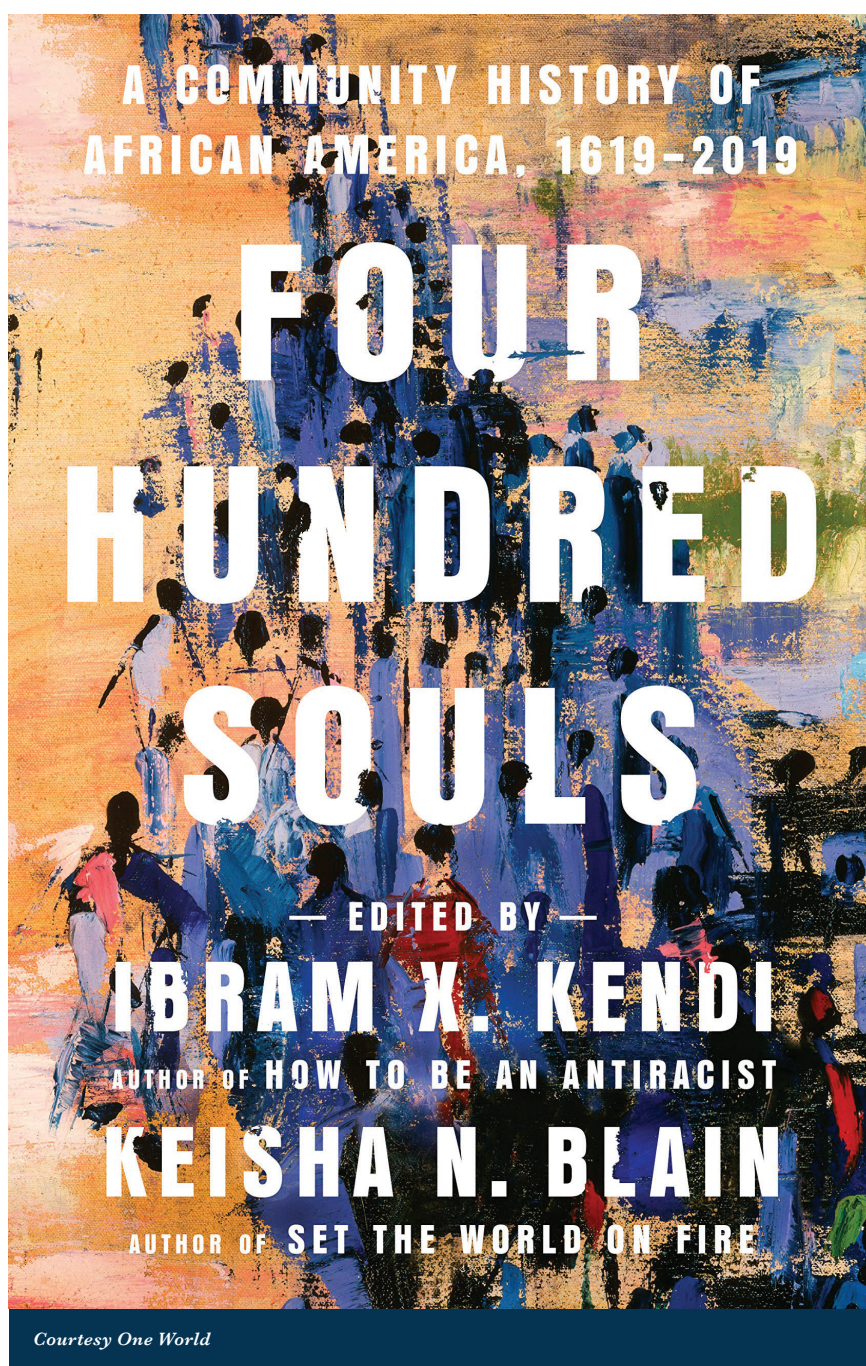
New York Public Library/public domain. Image cropped.

the police, or to simply survive childbirth, we can see that the afterlife of slavery reverberates intimately in the lives of African American women,” Morgan said. A community history must include the entire community.

Poet and English professor Chet’la Sebree (Bucknell Univ.) contributed “And the Record Repeats” for the 1939–79 section. The poem centers on Black music playing in the background of both extraordinary and everyday events. For Sebree, the piece reflects how “in so many ways we, as Black Americans, feel stuck in a similar song. We’re still fighting to be seen and treated as citizens, but we are continuing the fight for progress, to not be stuck in this groove, ‘to lift the needle,’ as I say in the poem.” She continued, “As a Black woman and artist, I wanted to give Black women and artists—like Alvin Ailey, Shirley Chisholm, Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, Nina Simone, and the Sugarhill Gang—a nod in particular.” As Sebree told *Perspectives*, “Despite how it may seem, especially after Amanda Gorman’s expertly delivered ‘The Hill We Climb’ at the recent inauguration, I find that commissioned and occasional poems are notoriously difficult to write.” But she nevertheless was “truly honored to be asked to contribute to this collection as someone whose poetic practice is often rooted in research and history.”

Released in early February, *Four Hundred Souls* is a powerful work of public scholarship, a model for interdisciplinary thinking, and a useful teaching resource. Perhaps more importantly, though, it is a work that grapples with what it means to create a work of community history for a broad, general public. As Blain said, “We firmly believe that this is one of the most effective ways to capture the richness and diversity of African American history.” **P**

Laura Ansley is managing editor at the AHA. She tweets @lmansley.



GABRIELLA VIRGINIA FOLSOM

ADVOCACY BRIEFS

AHA Supports University Professors and History Departments under Threat

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the AHA remains committed to supporting historians and the study of history—in January, the AHA condemned the report of “The [Former] President’s Advisory 1776 Commission,” defended university professors and history departments under threat, and supported historians conducting LGBTQ-oriented research.

AHA Condemns Report of Advisory 1776 Commission

On January 20, the AHA issued a statement condemning the report from “The [Former] President’s Advisory 1776 Commission.” “Written hastily in one month after two desultory and tendentious ‘hearings,’” the AHA writes, “without any consultation with professional historians of the United States, the report fails to engage a rich and vibrant body of scholarship that has evolved over the last seven decades.” As of February 11, 46 organizations have signed onto the statement. See page 8 for the full statement.

AHA Calls for University of Kansas to Preserve Employment Protections for Faculty

On January 25, the AHA issued a letter urging the University of Kansas to reject a Kansas Board of Regents policy that would “temporarily allow public institutions of higher education to terminate or suspend employees, including tenured

faculty, without declaring a financial emergency.” “As historians,” the AHA writes, “we are especially aware of what can happen when principles of academic freedom in higher education lose the essential protection of tenure.” The university should “reject this extraordinary departure that would enable the university to enact drastic and arbitrary personnel actions while bypassing the process of formally declaring financial emergency.”

AHA States Concerns Regarding History Program and Faculty Cuts at University of Evansville

On January 26, the AHA issued a letter expressing grave concern regarding the proposed removal of the history major and termination of two tenured history professors at the University of Evansville. Calling the process leading to the proposed cuts “an especially striking embarrassment for an institution whose stated values emphasize ‘a culture of trust,’” the AHA urged the university to “consider the educational and community impacts of this shortsighted plan for realignment, which will serve to weaken the preparation of your students for the global citizenship imperative to economic and civic accomplishment, as well as the lifelong learning essential to professional success.”

AHA Urges California Legislature to Amend AB1887 for Scholars

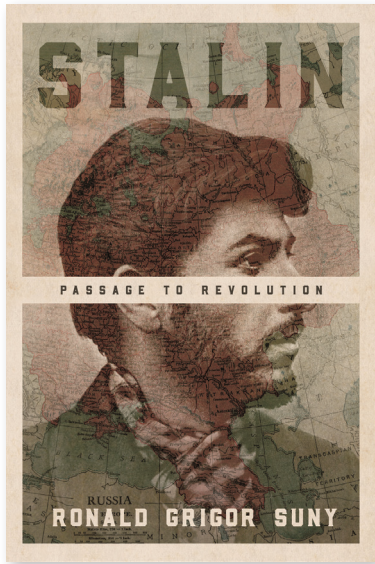
On January 28, the AHA sent a letter requesting that the California State

Legislature amend the list of exceptions to AB1887, a law that bans state-funded travel to specified states with anti-LGBTQ laws. While the AHA “support[s] the principles underlying AB1887,” it is concerned that the boycott “restricts the work of graduate students and early career scholars, preventing them from completing research that would actually showcase the significance of LGBTQ life, among other pressing subjects, in targeted states.” The AHA urged the legislature to “permit state-funded travel for research and educational initiatives related to the discipline of history, broadly conceived, including LGBTQ culture, health, law, and politics.”

AHA Signs onto ACLS Statement Urging Kansas Board of Regents to Uphold Employment Protections for Faculty

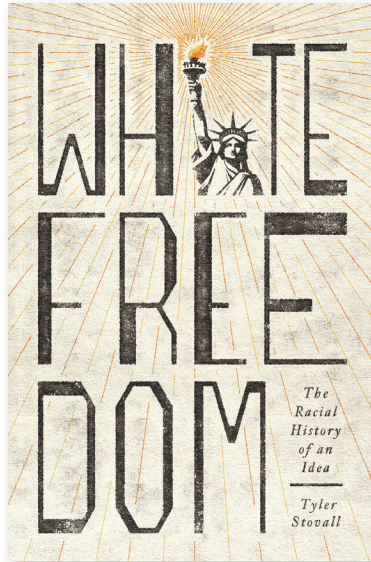
On January 28, the AHA signed onto a statement by the American Council of Learned Societies urging the Kansas Board of Regents to withdraw its endorsement of a proposed policy that would “ease the path to suspending, dismissing, or terminating employees, including tenured faculty members, without undertaking the processes of formally declaring a financial emergency.” **P**

Gabriella Virginia Folsom is communications and operations assistant at the AHA. She tweets @gvfolsom.



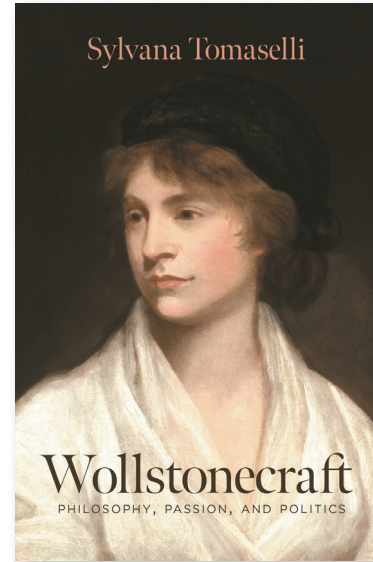
“In highly readable prose Mr. Suny... tells the story of the young Stalin’s rise.”

—Joshua Rubenstein,
Wall Street Journal



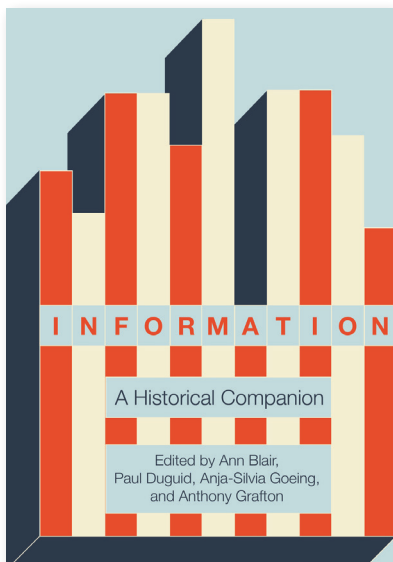
“Extremely convincing.”

—Ilana Masad, *NPR.org*



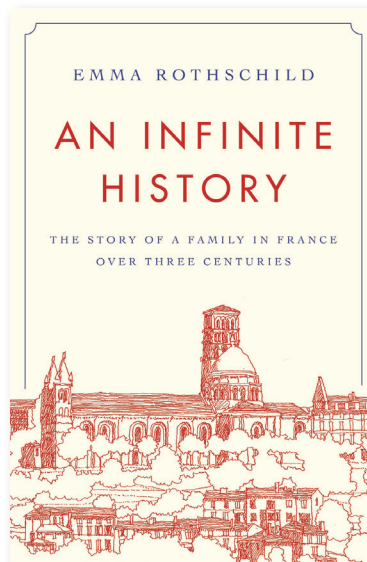
“Sylvana Tomaselli’s book moves dexterously between her feelings and reasonings, producing a portrait that is both fresh and compelling.”

—Barbara Taylor, *Guardian*



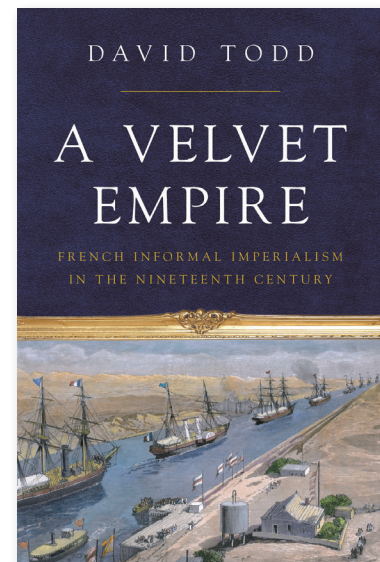
“This is a book that will be read, as we say, for information, but it’s also that rare reference book that demands to be dipped into for pleasure, and devoured cover to cover.”

—Leah Price, author of *What We Talk about When We Talk about Books*



“This rich tapestry of a book will become a classic of historical writing for years to come.”

—Lynn Hunt, author of
History: Why It Matters



“In this impressive and important book, David Todd breathes much-needed life into classic questions about the politics and economics of globalization.”

—Alexia Yates, University
of Manchester

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JEFFREY MATHIAS

AMERICAN SOLITUDE

Notes Toward a History of Isolation



In a 1957 isolation study, psychologist Robert R. Holt, seen here demonstrating his experimental apparatus, used ping-pong balls cut in half to cover the subject's eyes and further the sensory deprivation. But as the reflected image of the photographer makes clear, the subject was never truly alone.

Collection of Robert R. Holt, courtesy of the Holt family

SINCE THE OUTBREAK of COVID-19, quarantine has remade the nature of social ties, labor, and politics around the trauma of contagion. In March 2020, isolation via social distancing became ironically a shared experience, a collective loneliness of disrupted routines and relationships. While some feigned entrepreneurial fervor, many have likely experienced quarantine as an anxious monotony, alone without escape. As the pandemic has dragged on in the United States for a year, the boredom of the early quarantine has largely given way to modes of being alone together: a nation of individuals and closed small groups, both networked and isolated by design, anxiously looking over our shoulders as we careen toward an uncertain future. Now a year into the pandemic, we—whatever “we” means here—are in the thick of solitude. But this is the anxious isolation of the bunker rather than the retreat of the monastery.

Being alone, of course, has a history. Indeed, even setting aside the history of medical quarantine, one might point to medieval hermeticism or Henry David Thoreau’s insistence on solitude’s ecstatic reverie as antecedents for social distancing. Contemporary concerns over the psychological effects of loneliness and isolation are steeped in Cold War-era military science and cultural anxieties. Both military planners and scientists imagined high-technological modern warfare, conducted at a distance in remote territories, as a form of militarized solitude. Loneliness was a unique threat to the distinctly Cold War virtue of vigilance: anticipatory dread, watchfulness for the impending disaster of nuclear war. A genealogy of isolation as a constellation of affects—monotony, boredom, worry, and loneliness—can show how contemporary concerns fit within Cold War cultural formations.

Consider the speleologist Michel Siffre. In 1962, Siffre descended some 100 meters into darkness to reach the subterranean cavern of Scarasson, deep beneath the Alps. Pitching a small nylon tent atop a glacier, Siffre remained in this abyss for two months, subjecting himself to the effects of isolation, low temperatures, and thin atmospheric pressure—both as a physiological experiment and a bid for publicity. Settling into his frozen solitude, Siffre declared Scarasson a refuge from society, writing in his book *Beyond Time*, “I told myself, ‘I am free!’ . . . I was no longer a slave, either to men and their social habits or to the effect of the rotation of the earth on its axis.” However, as days became weeks, boredom and monotony sank in. Despondent and alone, Siffre read philosopher Henri Bergson by the light of his gas lamp and listened to American jazz records on a hand-cranked turntable, anxiously awaiting the end of his confinement.

Siffre is perhaps best understood not as a cave diver with a philosophical bent but as a prototype for the American soldier, alone in hostile conditions. The American pursuit of a high-technological strategy made far-flung and exotic geographies—the Arctic, the deep sea, outer space—into new terrains for warfare. Alone in the Canadian wilderness, radar operators along the Distant Early Warning Line watched for the earliest signs of nuclear attack, bathed in the green glow of the radar screen. Both the military and the popular press imagined the boredom and monotony that accompanied solitary duty not only as a threat to the psyche of these individual soldiers but to the nation itself. Newly dominant on the world stage, the United States was thought to be only as strong as the vigilance of its soldiers in isolation.

As days became weeks,
boredom and monotony sank in.

Accordingly, psychologists and psychiatrists across North America made laboratory hermits out of research subjects in a scientific vogue for isolation and sensory deprivation. Scientists seemed endlessly creative in pursuit of an objective form of isolation, a platonic ideal of solitude. Subjects were confined for days through a wide variety of apparatuses, ranging from opaque goggles and sound-canceling headphones—used to create an environment with sense limitations—to tanks in which subjects were immersed in dark, lukewarm water for hours, to five- by eight-foot rooms that replicated a more recognizable prison cell. Exiting the apparatus, experimental subjects, having been categorically “stimulus starved,” were subjected to a battery of psychological tests. Alarming, many subjects seemed malleable after their ordeal, their wills easily bent. In one experiment at McGill University, subjects were played recordings of a speech describing the virtues of everyday telepathy. Previously skeptical subjects rated the believability of these recordings exponentially higher after several days of isolation. Indeed, one subject reported later attempting to use ESP to cheat at poker. Such effects were dramatic, confirming scientists’ hypothesis about the role of isolation and solitary confinement in what was darkly referred to as “attitude change.”

Beyond their applications in understanding the psychological risks of remote terrains of warfare, these experiments were flash points in popular and scientific imaginaries of “brainwashing,” responding to the intense scandal that followed the defection of a number of American soldiers captured by Communist forces during the Korean War, most of whom had spent weeks in solitary confinement.


These captured soldiers were alternately portrayed as effete traitors or the unfortunate subjects of sophisticated methods of indoctrination. This brainwashing scandal proved to be a catalyst within the American human sciences. Intelligence agencies fueled public anxiety, funding journalists to write exposés of alleged sinister communist tactics, and directed research within psychology and psychiatry toward the development of parallel means of indoctrination. Often funded indirectly by the CIA, research on isolation furthered the development of scientific means of solitary confinement, new techniques of indoctrination to be used against enemy combatants. Indeed, CIA interrogation manuals from this period cite this research heavily, indicating that this line of research directly shaped ethically dubious intelligence practices. Experiments in isolation explored the depths of boredom endemic to American hegemony while producing new and dangerous forms of weaponized solitude.

For Siffre, isolation might have promised the highest freedom; for prisoners of war, it was likely the lowest form of confinement.

For Siffre in his cavern, isolation might have promised the highest freedom; for prisoners of war, it was likely the lowest form of confinement. Perhaps unexpectedly, this collision of freedom and confinement was most prominent in the burgeoning space program. The freedom of escaping the bounds of the Earth, it was feared, would be undone by the debilitatingly monotonous cocoon of the space capsule. Leaving Scarasson and blinking in the sunlight, Siffre found himself the object of intense scrutiny by aerospace physiologists from the US Air Force's School of Aerospace Medicine (SAM), who translated, mimeographed, and distributed Siffre's meticulously kept journal as ad-hoc scientific evidence. Scientists at SAM had conducted parallel laboratory experiments of their own since 1956, in anticipation of NASA's Project Mercury and the launch of solo astronauts into space. They sequestered Air Force personnel alone in a simulated space cabin for seven days at a time, an effort to catalog and mitigate the effects of isolation and boredom on astronauts' vigilance. In the suffocating solitude of space, scientists feared that astronauts might make grave errors in judgment, experience alarming hallucinations, or even develop schizophrenia. Siffre's experience provided a model for what prolonged isolation in the hostile environment of space might look like.

The analogy between Siffre's cave and a spaceship was just one of many made by aerospace physiologists attempting to understand the nature of isolation. More ominously, scientists drew further explicit analogies between potential astronauts in space and prisoners of war in solitary confinement. One physiologist wrote that the combination of unpredictable "danger" and "severe social and emotional isolation and confinement" rendered the conditions experienced by the prisoner of war "near 'space equivalent.'" Accordingly, scientific experts on the confinement of prisoners of war were frequent consultants on SAM's space cabin simulator, making strange bedfellows of aerospace physiologists and CIA-funded psychiatrists. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, prospective astronauts were routinely subjected to isolation and sensory deprivation as part of a battery of medical and psychological examinations. While it's unlikely that indoctrination was among NASA's aims—at least, explicitly—astronauts perceived isolation as a test to be passed, an opportunity to demonstrate American fortitude in the face of adversity. Unlike lapsed soldiers captured during the Korean War, the astronaut must, as the popular press put it, "excel in loneliness."

Alone and cocooned against the hostile environment of the early pandemic, I found myself often thinking of Siffre—an icon of isolation that illustrates both its utopian and dismal forms. If the underbelly of the Alps was a staging ground for an experiment in isolation, so too was my apartment in New York. Indeed, for the radar operator scanning for nuclear attack, the prisoner in solitary confinement, the astronaut attuned toward the future battlefield of space, and for Siffre himself, isolation was interwoven with a ceaseless dread, an apocalypse not yet arrived and yet unending—a prospect hardly unfamiliar in our contemporary moment.

Now a year into the pandemic, we are perhaps seeing the effects of isolation on a scale unimaginable to mid-century scientists: a world wounded not only by COVID, but by a solitary anxiety lodged between individual and population. At the time of this writing, vaccines have begun to trickle out, leaving me to wonder: What new and likely diminished horizon is coming into view as we collectively exit our own Alpine caves? 

Jeffrey Mathias is the 2020–21 NASA/AHA Fellow in the History of Space Technology and a PhD candidate in science and technology studies at Cornell University. He tweets @cheffmathias.

COURTNEY E. THOMPSON

CHOOSE YOUR PROFESSIONAL PATH

Using Flexible Assignment Structures in Graduate Courses



Graduate students in Courtney E. Thompson's classes select their own assignment paths to develop skills directly applicable to their professional goals.

Justin Luebke/Unsplash

FOR ALL OF the hand-wringing about the lack of tenure-track jobs, graduate faculty often seem indisposed or ill-equipped to prepare their students for jobs outside of higher ed. Faculty who train graduate students must prepare students for multiple career paths by focusing not just on developing students' intellectual engagement with the historiography or research tools, but by also introducing them to history career paths broadly construed. Building these paths into our teaching is one powerful way to signal to our students that there are multiple ways of being a historian.

When I planned my first graduate-level course, I dutifully assigned the expected historiographic paper. Although my students produced great work, the essays were uniform and lacked vibrancy. I realized that this kind of assignment had limited utility. First, many graduate students were ill-equipped to write a historiographic essay. But second, and more importantly, writing a historiographic essay only really taught them how to write historiography—not a bad skill to have, but redundant if they were doing the same in other courses. I wanted to develop a pedagogical approach that would provide my students with tools that they could apply in their other courses and beyond the classroom. This seemed particularly important since I teach in a program with both MA and PhD students, who come to the classroom with varied experiences and professional goals. While some hope to be hired as tenure-track faculty, others are looking at career paths that lead into high schools, museums, libraries and archives, or other sites and fields. I began to consider how I could help these students by focusing on transferable skills, demonstrating how knowledge of the field and historical research skills can serve as a foundation for various forms of historical work for different audiences.

Over the next few years, I experimented with various assignments and assignment structures in my graduate courses, using student feedback to redesign these assignments for the next graduate course. But I was still unsatisfied. It seemed as silly to ask a roomful of graduate students whose professional aspirations did not include major independent research projects to write a fellowship application as to write a historiographic essay. And with every new class, I had more assignment options to draw from, which became harder and harder to choose between. I hit upon the solution: Why not let *them* choose?

And so my interpretation of the “Choose Your Path” assignment structure was born, first tested in my History of the Body colloquium during the fall of 2020. I decided there would be three key assignments, which would feed into one another. After an initial annotated bibliography

project—thus foregrounding historiography and using it as a stepping-stone, rather than treating it as an end point—each student would pick a “path” through which they would complete the other two projects, which were scaled to be more or less the same amount of work. The three paths I settled on were pedagogy, research, and public engagement, though I considered other options and plan to expand this decision tree further in the future.

All students begin the assignment path with an annotated bibliography that becomes the foundation for their further projects. While they shared in the experience of completing an annotated bibliography, their topics were wide-ranging and specific to their own research interests, as I encouraged them to find topics and materials that were relevant to both their short-term and long-term goals. After this point, they selected a path and began work on the second project, which was either a new course proposal and syllabus (pedagogy), a fellowship application (research), or a pitch and op-ed (public scholarship). After the second assignment, they moved on to the third major assignment, building once again from the research and materials from the first two: a lecture draft and presentation (pedagogy), an annotated document and primary source analysis (research), or an exhibition proposal and design (public scholarship). Each of these assignments had multiple components and instructions, some borrowed from past courses, and some (the public scholarship track) were invented wholesale for this assignment.

I hit upon the solution:
Why not let *them* choose?

Since each assignment built on the previous one and all were founded on close attention to historical literature, the varying products demonstrated the centrality of research and scholarship to all branches of history for various audiences and in different venues. The assignment structure puts into practice James Grossman's recent call to expand the boundaries of our definition of scholarship (“The Diffusion of Knowledge, *Perspectives*, January 2021). As he observed, “As we broaden the terrain of our work, we correspondingly widen the appeal of our discipline to individuals interested in history but also committed to influence beyond the academy, whether from within the professoriate or beyond.” The basic tools of research can and should be presented as a foundation for different kinds of historical labor for different audiences, broadening students' conception of what history is and where and how it is done through different formats. As Grossman explained, this kind of work

helps us “prepare graduate students for the many ways of being historians.”

The three paths were selected based on my own experience and skill sets, as I believed myself capable of assessing and guiding students through this work. This could be seen as a limitation. While I’ve designed exhibitions, for example, my experience (and the assignment) was still heavily reliant on traditional academic research. Other forms of public engagement and scholarship are beyond my own current skill set; indeed, it wasn’t until I assigned a pitch and op-ed (and developed corresponding guidelines) that I was emboldened to start doing the same. In future iterations, I hope to bring in campus experts in fields including archival management, exhibition planning, and digital scholarship to expand the options and train my students (and me) in developing these projects. Such cross-campus collaboration, while not incorporated into my course design this past fall, is a goal for my graduate pedagogy in the future.

While a simple idea at heart, this assignment structure conveys some key notions to students.

I was up front with my students about the fact that this was an experimental design. The assignment structure thus became an open conversation about how we develop assignments and the goals of graduate coursework, which provided us with another set of lessons and further transparency about what history is and how it is done. At the end of the semester, they provided me with useful suggestions about how to revise this structure for the future, including adding “mini-orals” presentation components, digital humanities options, and other possible assignments.

Since this course assignment design is iterative and interactive, in the future I hope that it will look less like a set of narrow tracks and more like a branching tree of options and decisions, with each branch relating to a set of skills and a professional path or paths. I also intend in future iterations of this assignment to incorporate concepts and resources from the AHA’s Career Diversity for Historians initiative. The “Career Diversity Five Skills,” for example, could be used as a starting point for five branching assignment paths. The resources available as part of this initiative might also provide students with a starting point for articulating their long- and short-term goals, which in turn could allow me to create assignment paths and options for them to respond to their needs.

While a simple idea at heart, this assignment structure conveys some key notions to students. First, it encourages them to think of history as an applied field with different professional pathways, products, and audiences. When one also incorporates ongoing discussion of professionalization and five-year plans, as I did in this course, it helps students think actively about their engagement with history and their pursuit of a professional path, rather than treating it as a passive set of developments one falls into. Second, treating these three (or more) paths as co-equal sends a strong signal that there is not a “Plan A” and “Plan B,” but that there are a number of equivalent professional paths open to someone with an advanced degree in history. Third, it also responds to student needs and goals. If an MA student has a clear goal of becoming a primary or secondary school teacher post-degree, why not provide them with tools now that can be applied later, by demonstrating how historical theory and methodology can and should inform course design at every level?

Of course, a flexible assignment structure cannot solve all of the discipline’s challenges. But perhaps such structures will force both faculty and students to confront the realities facing history graduate students, helping to both acknowledge and legitimize their goals. If students are equipped for multiple paths through the development of multiple skill sets, and these possible paths are treated as equally valid and valuable, perhaps this would be a small step away from the idea that we ought to “fix” the jobs crisis and toward reframing who historians are, what they do, and what paths they take. **P**

Courtney E. Thompson is an assistant professor at Mississippi State University. She tweets @Dr_C_Thompson.

ROBERT B. TOWNSEND

HAS THE DECLINE IN HISTORY MAJORS HIT BOTTOM?

Data from 2018–19 Show Lowest Number since 1980



Although the total number of students earning BAs in history continues to decline, data from 2018–19 reveal that a slightly more diverse student body is earning those degrees.

drpavloff/Flickr/CC BY-NC 2.0

HISTORY HAS A majors problem. The number of students earning degrees in the field fell precipitously after the Great Recession of 2008, and while the decline became a bit more gradual before the pandemic (especially when including double majors), it has continued to slip. These numbers offer a key measure of the health of the discipline in academia, but they can also have a more tangible effect at many institutions, as administrators often use majors to allocate resources and faculty lines.

The raw numbers are grim. New US Department of Education data for the 2018–19 academic year shows the annual number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in history, history teacher education, and historic preservation and conservation fell to 23,923—down more than a third from 2012 and the smallest number awarded since the late 1980s (Fig. 1).

The good news, such as it is, was that the decline slowed significantly from 2018 to 2019 (down by just 140 bachelor’s degrees awarded). While a further decline is hardly something to celebrate, the contrast with the previous trend is

quite notable. From 2012 to 2018, history bachelor’s degrees were falling at an average annual rate of over 7 percent per year, so slowing the descent to less than 1 percent suggests that trends could be in flux.

The good news, such as it is, was that the decline slowed significantly from 2018 to 2019.

While the effects of the pandemic remain a significant unknown, the slowing of the recent declines in majors might reflect creative efforts by departments to reverse the trend. As reported in *Perspectives* in September 2017 (“Decline in History Majors Continues, Departments Respond”), by the mid-2010s, history departments were actively revising their courses and programs to attract students into the major. The timing of the recent easing from the more precipitous annual drops coincides with those efforts and provides some hope that the declines are nearing the bottom.

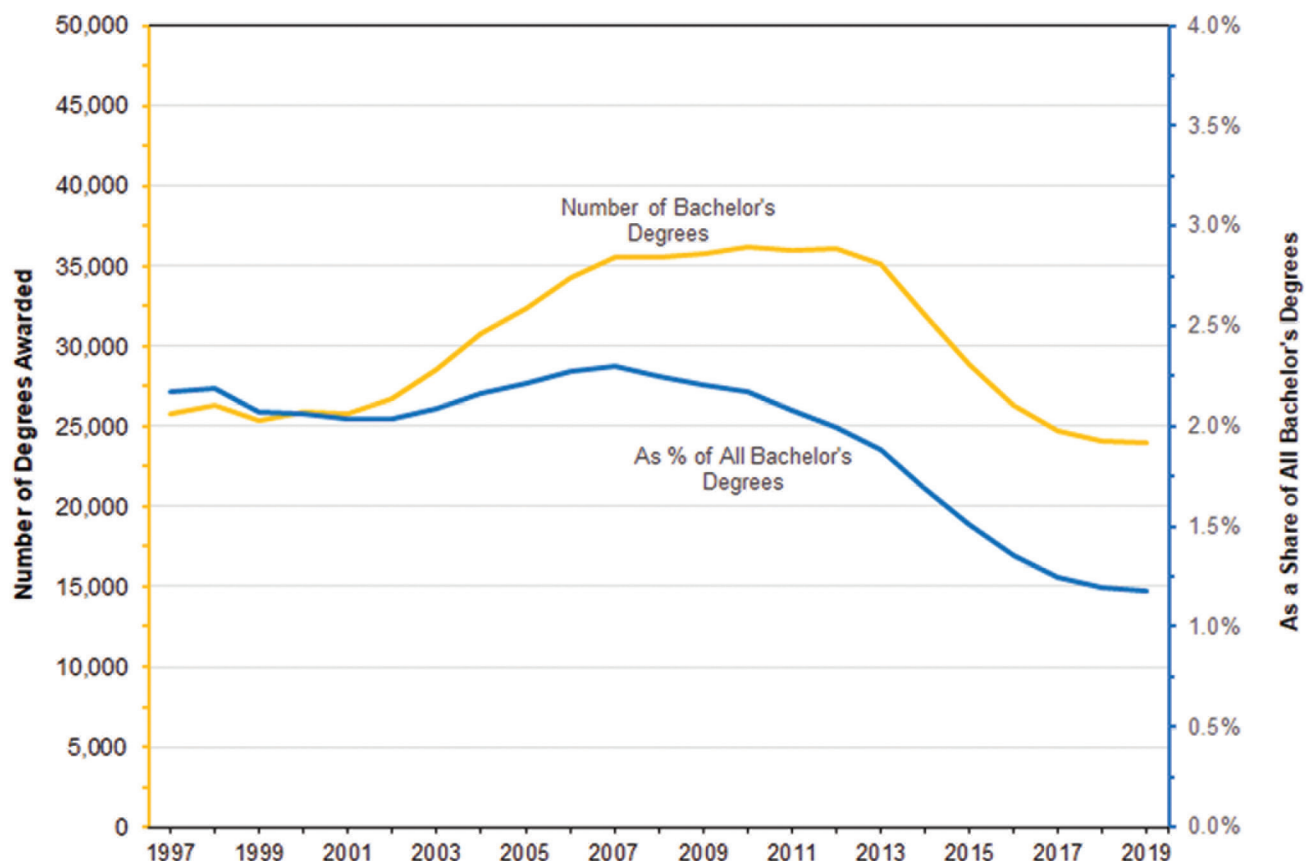


Fig. 1: Degree completions in history (absolute number and as a percentage of all bachelor’s degrees), 1997–2019
Data source: IPEDS Completions Survey from the US Department of Education

One crucial issue is “market share,” which is complicated in any context where choices are increasing. History departments trying to argue for institutional resources based on the number of students attracted to the major have to face the reality that the number of students earning degrees in other academic programs continues to grow (particularly in the health sciences). History’s share of bachelor’s degrees has been falling faster than the total number of degrees. As of 2019, history accounted for slightly less than 1.2 percent of all bachelor’s degrees awarded, the lowest share in records that extend back to 1949. For comparison, in 1967, history accounted for 5.7 percent of all bachelor’s degrees, but that number fell to as low as 1.6 percent in the mid-1980s before rising again. Perhaps most notably, the recent changes have been pervasive across almost all demographic groups and institution types.

However, the decline is not universal. Of the 1,255 colleges and universities that awarded a history bachelor’s degree in 2012, 214 (17 percent) were conferring a larger number of degrees seven years later. But only a small handful of colleges showed substantial growth in their history degrees over that

time span, most notably Southern New Hampshire University and Liberty University, which have developed large online programs; they are the only colleges where the number of history degrees awarded increased by more than 100 from 2012 to 2019.

Those exceptions prove the rule: Very few history departments have been spared from the drop in majors, regardless of whether they are at public or private institutions, in any region of the country. Seventy-three institutions awarded no history degrees in 2019, and another 907 conferred fewer degrees. The declining appeal of history majors appears as widespread as it is large.

There was, however, a notable divergence in the demographics of the students earning degrees in history (Fig. 2). History has traditionally been one of the least diverse disciplines in race, ethnicity, and gender. In relative terms, the share of history bachelor’s degrees awarded to white, non-Hispanic Americans has been trending down for decades; it fell to slightly below 70 percent in 2019 for the first time on record.

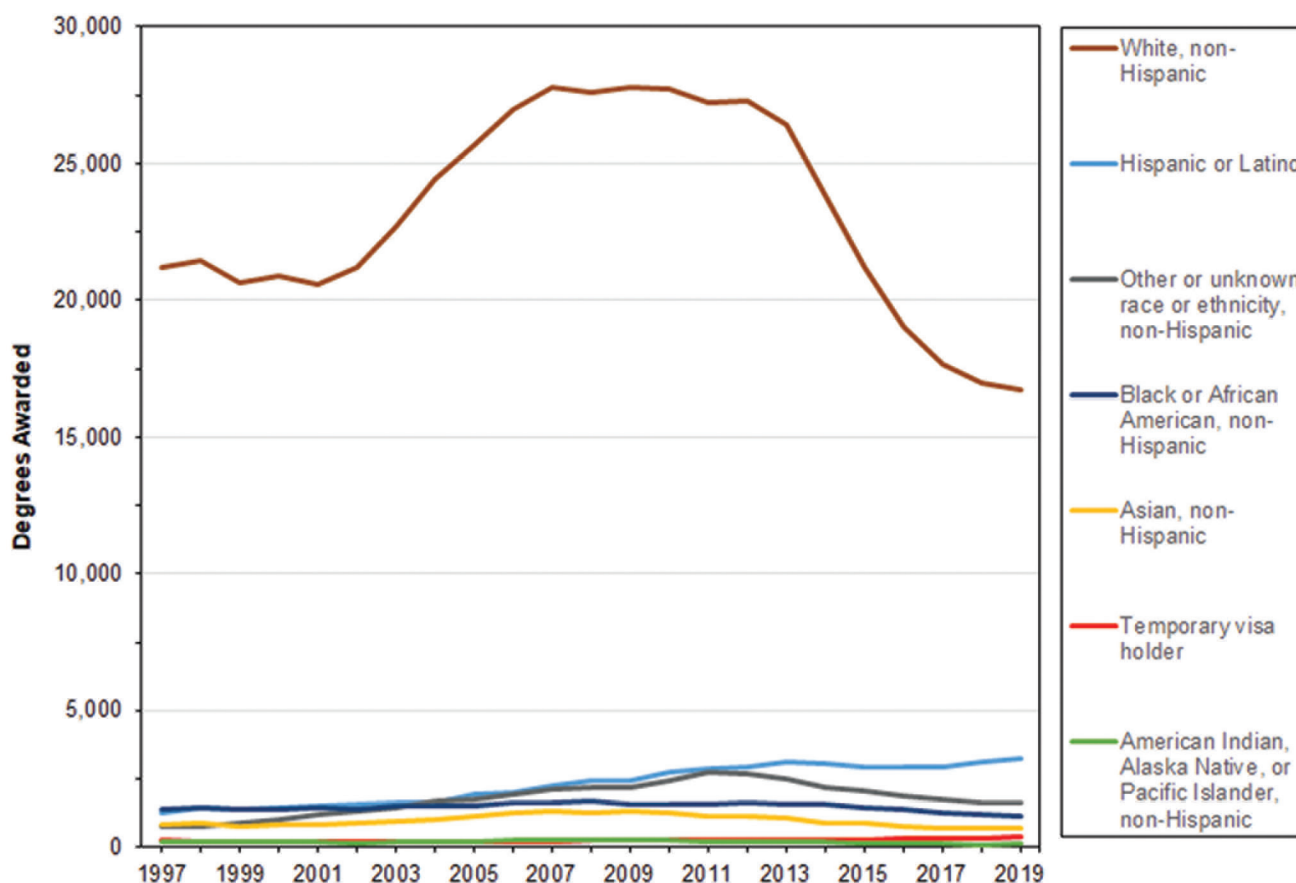


Fig. 2: Number of bachelor's degrees in history awarded to members of racial/ethnic groups, 1997–2019
Data source: IPEDS Completions Survey from the US Department of Education

Much of the recent change has occurred due to a substantial increase in the percentage of Hispanic or Latinx students in higher education, whose share of history bachelor's degrees sprang from 8.1 percent in 2012 to 13.5 percent in 2019, roughly in line with demographic shifts among all degree recipients.

The change in terms of relative percentages, however, masks a more dramatic change in the actual number of degrees awarded to each demographic group. While the overall number of degrees awarded in history fell sharply from 2012 to 2019, the number of graduates of Hispanic/Latino descent increased by 11 percent (from 2,925 degree recipients to 3,234). The only other demographic category to exhibit growth over that time was temporary visa holders, which increased 45 percent (albeit from a relatively modest 253 to 368). In comparison, the number of white and Asian American students earning undergraduate degrees in history fell by slightly less than 40 percent over the same span, while the number of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander degree recipients fell by 49 percent and African American recipients fell by 29 percent.

History remains considerably less diverse than the overall undergraduate student population.

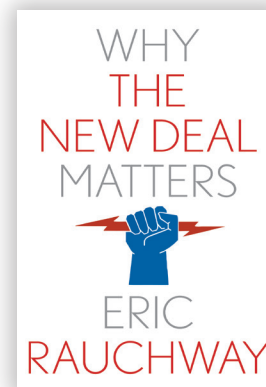
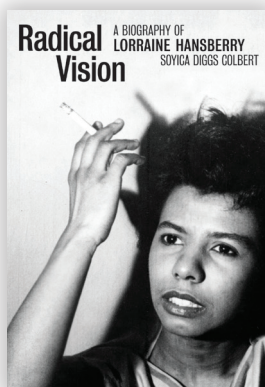
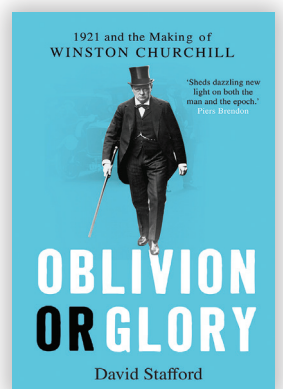
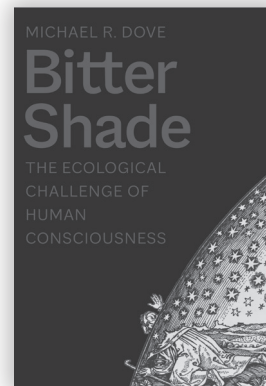
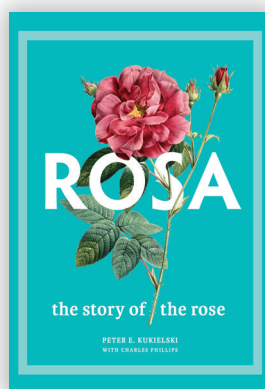
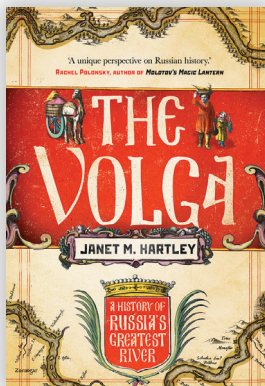
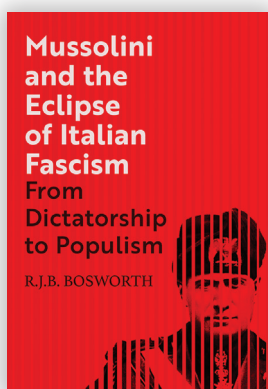
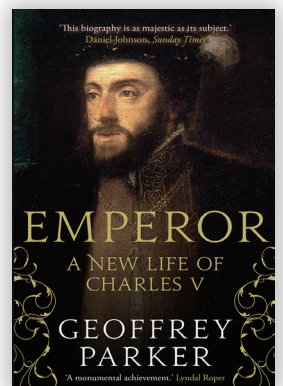
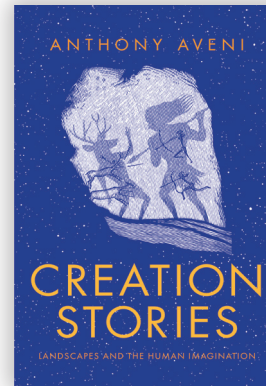
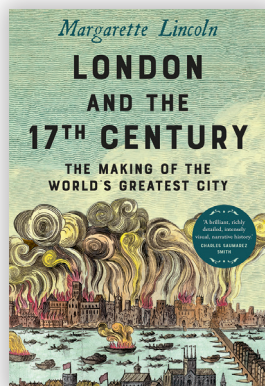
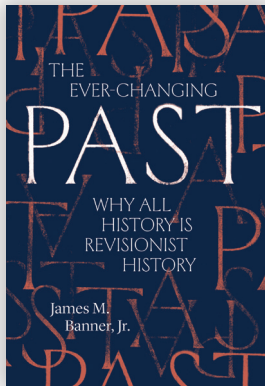
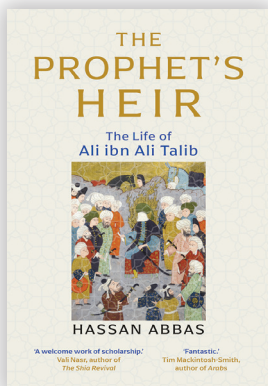
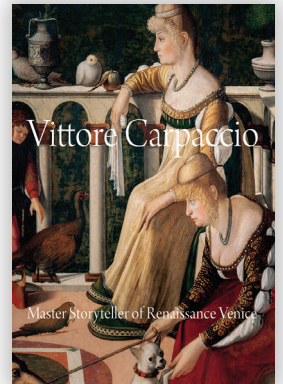
Despite these recent changes, history remains considerably less diverse than the overall undergraduate student population: 56 percent of all bachelor's degree recipients in 2019 were white, non-Hispanic compared to almost 70 percent of the graduates from history programs. While the representation of Native Americans in history is slightly higher than the average for all degree recipients (0.6 percent compared to 0.4 percent) and the share of Hispanic or Latino students in history is approaching parity with the average (13.5 percent compared to 14.5 percent), history remains well below the average in its share of Black degree recipients (4.8 percent compared to 9.3 percent) and Asian Americans (2.8 percent versus 7.2 percent).

Alongside the racial and ethnic disparities among degree recipients, history's long-term gender disparities appear to have calcified in recent years. While the share of women earning bachelor's degrees across academia has been at or near 57 percent for the past 20 years, in history that share topped out at almost 42 percent in 2001 and then drifted down to below 40 percent in 2014. The share increased slightly in recent years but remains stuck below 41 percent, an outlier among the humanities disciplines.

Regrettably, one can only speculate about the disparities, as the data does not speak to the “why” of these trends, only the “where” and the “who.” But if you find your program struggling to attract majors, rest assured that you are not alone. **P**

Robert B. Townsend is interim director for humanities, arts, and culture programs at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and co-director of the Humanities Indicators project. He tweets @rbthisted.

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Virtual | AHA

Virtual AHA is a series of online opportunities to bring together communities of historians, build professional relationships, discuss scholarship, and engage in professional and career development. A service to our members as they navigate the current emergency, Virtual AHA provides a forum for discussing common issues, building research networks, and broadening and maintaining our professional community in dire circumstances. It also provides resources for online teaching and other professional and career development. We are creating various kinds of content to help historians connect, while helping us learn more about what our members want and need.

Virtual AHA will run through June 2021. It incorporates the AHA Colloquium, our name for content drawn from the canceled 2021 annual meeting. It also includes an online teaching forum, career development workshops, a series of History Behind the Headlines webinars, National History Center programming, and more. These programs are free, and AHA membership is not required to register. Many of the webinars will be available for later viewing on the AHA's YouTube channel at youtube.com/historiansorg.

See historians.org/VirtualAHA for details. Download the Virtual AHA app at guidebook.com/g/virtualaha for the latest schedule updates and links.

Virtual Exhibit Hall

The AHA Virtual Exhibit Hall will be available online through June 2021. The Virtual Exhibit Hall provides an opportunity to learn about the latest historical scholarship, take advantage of publisher discounts, and network with editors and press staff. If you normally look forward to the exhibits at the annual meeting, the Virtual Exhibit Hall offers a similar experience from the comfort of your home. Best of all, no name badge is necessary: the Exhibit Hall is free and open to the public. Check it out at historians.org/ExhibitHall.

Programming Content Streams

- **AHA Colloquium:** Bringing together communities of historians who ordinarily meet face-to-face at our annual meeting through web-based programming. Visit historians.org/Colloquium for a full list of staff- and participant-produced content.
- **History Behind the Headlines:** Featuring prominent historians discussing the histories behind current events and the importance of history and historical thinking to public policy and culture.
- **Online Teaching Forum:** Helping historians plan for teaching in online and hybrid environments.
- **Virtual Career Development:** Emphasizing career exploration and skill development for graduate students and early career historians.
- **Virtual Seminars for Department Chairs:** Supporting department chairs through the transitions and uncertainties resulting from COVID-19. Webinars will be small-group discussions (capped at 10 participants) and will be facilitated by an experienced department chair.
- **National History Center Congressional Briefings:** Briefings by leading historians on past events and policies that shape the issues facing Congress today.
- **Washington History Seminar:** Facilitating understanding of contemporary affairs in light of historical knowledge from a variety of perspectives. A joint venture of the National History Center of the AHA and the History and Public Policy Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Upcoming Events

Visit historians.org/VirtualAHA for details on these and other events that will be scheduled between now and March.

March 1	Washington History Seminar— <i>The Black Republic: African Americans and the Fate of Haiti</i>
March 2	AHA Colloquium— <i>AHR Conversation: Black Internationalism</i>
March 8	Washington History Seminar— <i>Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia</i>
March 9	AHA Colloquium—Slavery and Space: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives
March 15	Washington History Seminar— <i>Assignment Russia: Becoming a Foreign Correspondent in the Crucible of the Cold War</i>
March 16	AHA Colloquium—Reevaluating the Impact of the “Conquest of Mexico” at 500 Years
March 18	Career Development—Historical Research beyond the Professoriate
March 22	Washington History Seminar— <i>The Politics of Mass Violence in the Middle East</i>
March 23	AHA Colloquium—Teaching the Medieval as Mediterranean: Reorienting the Metanarrative
March 25	AHA Colloquium—Oceanic Worlds: A Roundtable
March 29	Washington History Seminar— <i>Bound by War: How the United States and the Philippines Built America’s First Pacific Century</i>
March 30	AHA Colloquium—Fifty Years of Bangladesh: Tracing Law, Literature, and Liberty in Transition
March 31	AHA Colloquium—Getting Started in Digital History Workshop

In Case You Missed It

The following recordings are available on the AHA’s YouTube channel at youtube.com/historiansorg.

Online Teaching Forum

- History TAs in the Time of COVID
- Deep Thoughts: Metacognition and Teaching History
- The Role of Higher Ed in AP History Courses and Exams

Career Development

- Careers for Historians in the Tech Industry
- Making the Most of Your Postdoc

AHA Colloquium

- History PhDs in the World of Entrepreneurship
- History and Historians in Response to COVID-19 (three-event series): Plagues Past and Present; Containing Contagion; Infection and Inequality
- New Military History
- Online Learning via the Digital Humanities, the Online Classroom, and the Hybrid Classroom
- Late-Breaking Plenary: The International Implications of the US Election

- Plenary: Erasing History
- 2021 Presidential Address: Slow History

History Behind the Headlines

- Presidential Debates in Historical Perspective
- Historians Reflect on the 2020 Election

Washington History Seminar

- Recordings are available on the National History Center’s YouTube channel.

Further Information about the AHA Colloquium for Those Accepted for the 2021 Program

People originally scheduled to be on the 2021 program have a variety of options for sharing their work. Keep an eye on historians.org/VirtualAHA for regular updates.

A PDF program, documenting all sessions accepted by the AHA Program Committee and the affiliated societies, is posted on the AHA website at historians.org/program so that participants can validate their expected participation for their CVs. Anyone who was expecting to deliver a prepared presentation will have the opportunity to post written remarks on the AHA website. **P**

CONFRONTING A PANDEMIC

The AHA Supports Historians with the Help of NEH CARES

When the COVID-19 global pandemic hit the United States in March 2020, the AHA staff reacted quickly. As we navigated new work-from-home routines, got to know one another's children and pets, and adjusted to Zoom meetings and Slack consultations, we also recognized that the crisis prompted specific needs—and unexpected opportunities—for the community of historians.

With support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) via the CARES Act, the AHA launched “Confronting a Pandemic: Historians and COVID-19” in June 2020 under the direction of Emily Swafford. A series of virtual programs and two new online resources, “Confronting a Pandemic” was designed to both highlight the expertise of historians and help them navigate the uncertainties of a new virtual world, particularly transitions to remote teaching. In addition to creating resources for immediate use, “Confronting a Pandemic” has opened new avenues for the AHA to explore as it continues to support historians through the changes and evolving challenges brought by the COVID era.

Virtual AHA

NEH support has been crucial in launching Virtual AHA, a yearlong series of programming that features content drawn from our canceled annual meeting, as well as newly created events to help historians virtually navigate professional development. In summer 2020, we launched two content streams—the Online Teaching Forum and Virtual Career Development—to meet the immediate needs of historians. By December, these two streams produced more than a dozen online sessions that have garnered more than 1,000 registrations and over 1,300 views of the recordings. In this virtual environment, constituencies who might not otherwise interact with AHA resources, including K–12 teachers and historians outside the United States, found their way to these sessions.

The Online Teaching Forum has produced 10 events, a combination of interactive workshops and traditional webinars. As teachers navigated the ins and outs of Zoom,

Microsoft Teams, and other software, AHA staff were right there with them, learning how to make our content both secure and accessible, developing scheduling and marketing workflows on the fly, and tackling myriad technical concerns. In crafting this series, AHA staff are grateful for the generosity of colleagues who shared resources still in process (including the teams at H/21 and Middle Ages for Educators), and we are indebted to networks of colleagues already deeply engaged in these issues. In particular, colleagues involved in the AHA's History Gateways initiative proved to be important collaborators as we built a library of digital programming. A regional conference planned for Utah was converted to a pair of virtual panels, and colleagues at the John N. Gardner Institute for Undergraduate Excellence provided crucial content related to the pedagogy of teaching online. As part of History Gateways and organized by Julia Brookins, the AHA offered a virtual version of our annual Texas Conference on Introductory History Courses, including a keynote address by the Texas commissioner of higher education, as well as several course-based discussions.

Webinars have been a vital connection in a year when we are hungry for ways to build and maintain professional relationships.

The second stream, Virtual Career Development, grew out of a need identified at past annual meetings for quality professional development aimed at graduate students and early career historians. As a pandemic-induced recession prompted many departments to pause graduate admissions and wreaked havoc on academic job postings, graduate students and early career historians seemed especially vulnerable to the disruptions of COVID-19. Rooted in the AHA's network

of partners from the Career Diversity for Historians initiative and organized by Dylan Ruediger, this stream produced well-attended webinars and workshops aimed at helping early career historians identify their own agency in the face of historic challenges, whether that means retooling their path through graduate school or pivoting their career plans.

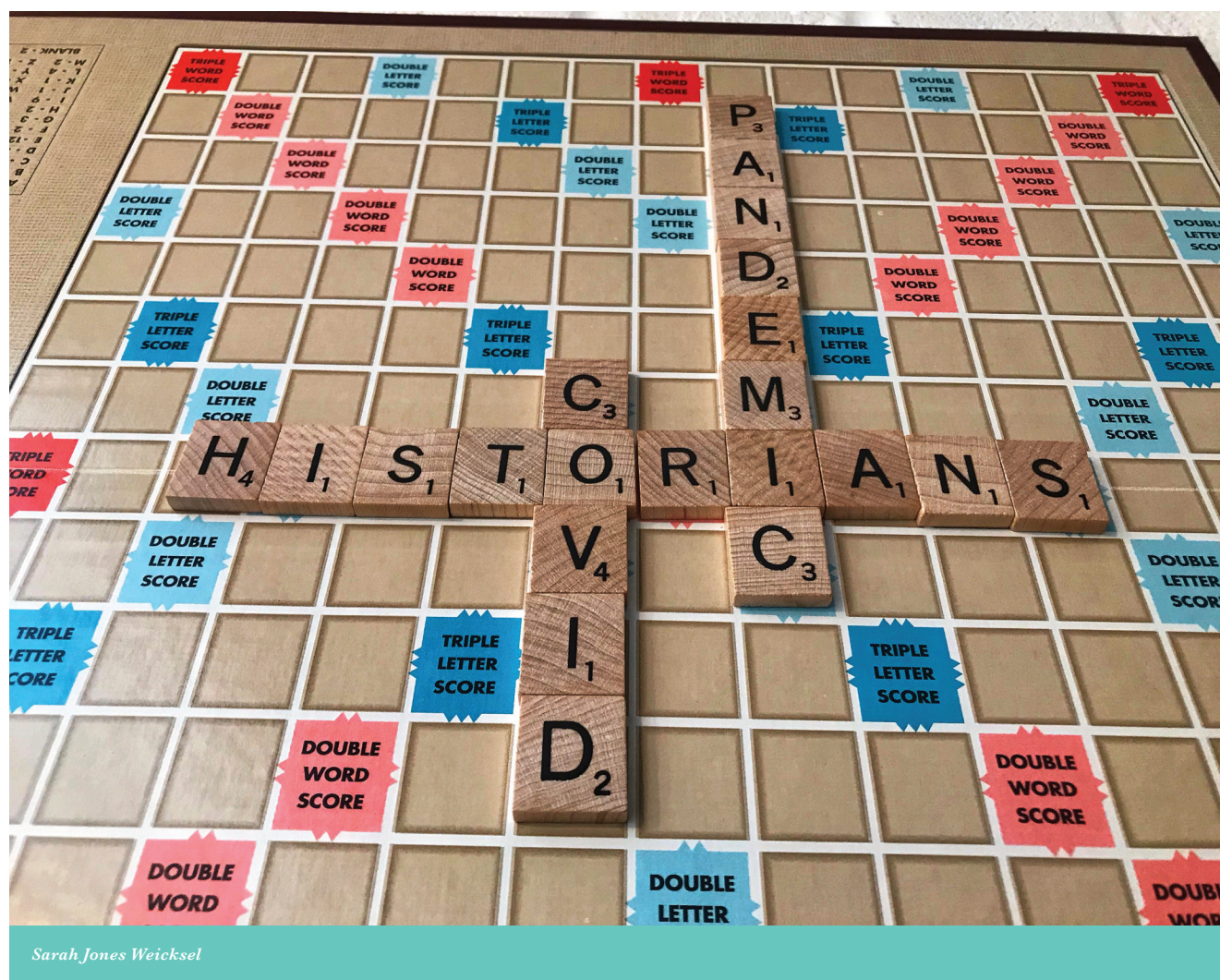
From these two streams, Virtual AHA has grown to include additional content streams that continue to be produced and made available, including the AHA Colloquium (sessions from the canceled 2021 annual meeting) and History Behind the Headlines. All are free to attend, and AHA membership is not required to register. By December, over 16,000 people had attended Virtual AHA webinars or viewed the recordings on Facebook and YouTube.

Debbie Ann Doyle, AHA meetings manager, reflected on the past year: “We have learned a lot about the possibilities and limitations of the webinar format. It has been a vital

connection in a year when we are hungry for ways to build and maintain professional relationships.” This has been a learning experience, with feedback from attendees vital to the process. As Doyle says, “People who may not have attended the annual meeting recently have been able to join us to discuss scholarship and engage in professional and career development. At the same time, feedback reveals a desire to interact not just with the panelists but with fellow participants in ways that are difficult in the webinar format. It will be interesting to see what lessons we can carry forward into the future.”

Online Resources

Before most of us realized the extent to which the pandemic would upend our lives and threaten healthcare systems, many historians anticipated the repercussions that would reverberate through everything from supply chains to civic life. In conjunction with the American Association of the History of Medicine and the History of Science Society,



Sarah Jones Weicksel

both AHA affiliated societies, the AHA began in March 2020 to collect and organize a bibliography that includes historians' popular and scholarly publications, podcasts, and lectures, as well as collecting initiatives to preserve individual and community experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States. With ingenuity and collaboration, *A Bibliography of Historians' Responses to COVID-19* has grown into a polished resource with more than 400 entries.

Melanie A. Peinado, who joined the AHA as an NEH CARES-funded researcher, created a first draft of the resource and has shepherded its evolution. Like the AHA's virtual offerings, creating the bibliography stretched the staff's imaginative muscles. "Figuring out how to meaningfully organize hundreds of entries was quite the creative challenge," says Peinado. "I found myself making daily adjustments to the taxonomy, and I continue to tweak it on a regular basis to reflect the expansive range of pandemic themes that historians have covered since March 2020."

RTR collects digital history projects, teaching guides, podcasts, documentaries, syllabi, accessibility guides, and teacher-created materials that are suitable for the classroom.

To improve the bibliography's accessibility for users, the team created a Zotero library that includes 145 searchable topics. Unexpectedly, the bibliography also provided educational experiences for undergraduate students. As part of a history of medicine class at Virginia Tech, a team of students annotated entries for the Zotero library and wrote review essays, gaining hands-on learning of digital humanities tools in the process. The AHA also worked with Ciara Cronin, an undergraduate intern from the University of Chicago, in organizing the bibliography. In the coming months, Peinado will continue to compile entries, update the online bibliography, and add to the bibliographic information in the Zotero library, resulting in a comprehensive collection of historians' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Complementing the AHA's virtual programming in support of online teaching, "Confronting a Pandemic" also launched Remote Teaching Resources (RTR) in August. The AHA owes the idea for RTR to Ada Palmer (Univ. of Chicago), an AHA member who created a "teaching wiki" for educators to share digital resources that was then adapted into RTR.

Under the leadership of Sarah Jones Weickel, RTR has been refined and developed into a set of vetted resources designed to assist faculty in teaching remotely online. With 240 resources (and more to come), the site has garnered thousands of page views. In order to vet the hundreds of resources submitted to RTR, the AHA hired part-time researchers with expertise in fields as varied as African American history, early modern European history, North African history, the history of East Asia, Latin American history, United States history from the colonial era through the present, world history, material culture, and public history. The researchers—Maureen Elgersman Lee, Erica Heinsen-Roach, Suzanne Marie Litrel, Melanie A. Peinado, and Marketus Presswood—also brought experience working in museums, K–16 education, and teaching at a variety of institutions.

The resources included in RTR are searchable and can be sorted by geographic region, theme, period, and resource type. The result is a collection that spans periods from the ancient world to the present and a broad range of teaching topics. RTR collects many high-quality digital history projects, teaching guides, podcasts, documentaries, syllabi, accessibility guides, and teacher-created materials that are suitable for the classroom. There is also a collection of resources dedicated to teaching in remote or hybrid environments. The research team has worked to ensure a professional vetting process, as well as robust metadata protocols, so that RTR will be useful for many years to come.

Lessons Learned

Where do we go from here? Like many of you, we fervently hope that this pandemic will soon end and that some of these efforts, like the bibliography, will transform from context for the present moment to primary sources for future historians. Yet the AHA has learned important lessons about how to support the community of historians. Virtual AHA will continue through June 2021. Some events, such as the AHA assignment charrette workshop, translated very well to a digital environment. And we were constantly amazed at the ability of our members and colleagues to adapt to virtual environments. While little can substitute for the stimulation and creative energy of an in-person gathering, AHA staff will continue to explore how our annual meeting and regional events can be supplemented by virtual events.

Similarly, the response to RTR and the bibliography has been robust. They were created to react to a specific moment, and AHA staff have been overwhelmed by how well they have been received. "Confronting a Pandemic" enabled the assembling of a skilled team of researchers and

the development of vetting protocols, which leaves us hopeful that we might continue to add to RTR, in lower volume, going forward. And RTR itself has already borne unexpected fruit. During the violent insurrection at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, AHA staff began to see a refrain in social media and email: How do I teach this *tomorrow*? AHA staff realized we could help. Within hours, drawing in large part from RTR's metadata, AHA staff produced first a Twitter thread and then an online resource of teaching tools, providing crucial context for classroom conversations. The resources have been shared by outlets as distinct as the *New York Times* and the US Embassy in Turkey.

Necessity is the mother of invention, as the saying goes. It has certainly been a year filled with challenges new to most of us, but we are hopeful that the community of historians will emerge with an even greater sense of purpose, with the staff at the AHA poised to help. **P**

Emily Swafford is director of academic and professional affairs at the AHA; she tweets @elswafford. Sarah Jones Weicksel is director of research and publications at the AHA; she tweets @SarahWeicksel.



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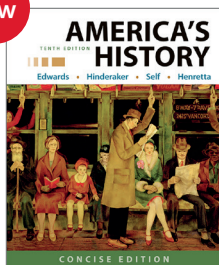
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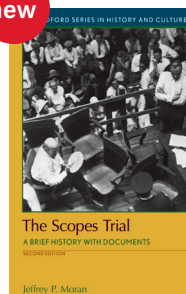
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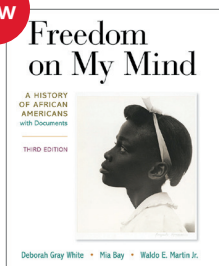
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SLOWING IT DOWN

In the March Issue of the American Historical Review

Fittingly enough, volume 126 of the *American Historical Review* opens with a plea for “slow history,” 2020 AHA President **Mary Lindemann**’s (Univ. of Miami) entreaty for taking a deep breath “to consider what benefits going slow offers to research, writing, and instruction.” The March issue of the *AHR* offers just that opportunity. That’s because in 2021 we shift from our previous breakneck pace of publishing five issues a year to a much more manageable four. Yet, doing so means each issue will contain more material, giving readers an opportunity to take their time in perusing the contents. In addition to Lindemann’s AHA presidential address, the March issue features five full-length articles, two History Unclassified essays, reviews of video games and films, and a review roundtable on the history of Islam.

The articles run the gamut from the material culture of the Renaissance to the sounds and smells of the Russian Revolution. In “Befeathering the European: The Matter of Feathers in the Material Renaissance,” **Ulinka Rublack** (Cambridge Univ.) considers the emergence and significance of cross-cultural objects in the context of trans-Atlantic cultural exchange. Her article charts the spectacular rise in importance of feathers in dress during the Renaissance, their relation to collecting practices, and their material relevance well into the 17th century. Rublack argues that the meanings of feather-work in Europe were influenced by encounters with the Americas, whose artistry 16th-century Europeans greatly admired. The article offers an alternative to accounts that present this era of early conspicuous consumption solely as a means to celebrate the prestige of rich patrons and instead inquires into how material culture might interact with human perception and the mind.

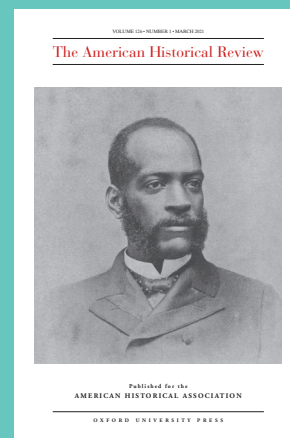
In another essay about the transmission of culture across boundaries, **Iris Idelson-Shein** (Ben-Gurion Univ.) discusses the corpus of translations of non-Jewish texts into Hebrew during the early modern period. Her article, “Rabbis of the (Scientific) Revolution: Revealing the Hidden Corpus of Early Modern Translations Produced by Jewish

Religious Thinkers,” argues that such translations suited the combination of attraction and anxiety with which many members of the Jewish religious elite observed the cultural developments of the early modern period. Anxious about the potential hazards entailed in direct exposure to non-Jewish texts and ideas, Jewish translators became cultural gatekeepers of non-Jewish worldviews. Idelson-Shein shows how they mistranslated both deliberately and accidentally, added and omitted, giving new meanings to non-Jewish works and concepts, and harnessing their sources to meet their own unique agendas as they confronted new, secular ideas.

A third article traverses more modern transnational terrain. In “Cuban Racial Politics in Nineteenth-Century New York: A Critical Digital Approach,” **Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof** (Univ. of Michigan) reappraises the racial politics of the 19th-century Cuban independence struggle in exile through an analysis of the experience of Rafael Serra and other Afro-Cuban activists in New York City. Serra (featured on the issue’s cover) led a community of Afro-descended Cuban migrants to the city that worked with José Martí to create the multiracial Cuban Revolutionary Party. Hoffnung-Garskof makes use of digital tools for network visualization and mapping to illustrate the evidence of race-based, class-based, and nationalist social networks among Serra’s constituents. These networks, he shows, facilitated a range of political strategies and alliances, including cooperation with African Americans. In presenting the digital evidence, Hoffnung-Garskof also offers a critical appraisal of the digital methods, tools, and labor arrangements made possible by these research techniques.

Feathers, ideas, politics . . . and mold. In “Mold’s Dominion: Science, Empire, and Capitalism in a Globalizing World,” **Gerard Sasges** (National Univ. of Singapore) traces the scientific discoveries in fermentation that transformed early 20th-century food-processing technology across the globe, especially in the production of alcohol. Focusing on the

Before returning to Havana in 1902, where he eventually won a seat in the Cuban House of Representatives, cigar maker, journalist, and politician Rafael Serra lived in New York City for nearly two decades. He was one of the architects of the ideal of a republic for all that came to be associated with his close political ally, the poet and journalist José Martí. With this photograph, published in 1896, Serra ensured that the Afro-Latinx New Yorkers who played such a central role in the evolution of Cuban nationalism would not be completely erased from the historical record of their movement. In "Cuban Racial Politics in Nineteenth-Century New York: A Critical Digital Approach," Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof uses digital tools to explore the experiences of Black Cuban migrants in the Gilded Age city. Photograph of Rafael Serra courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.



careers of a pair of biochemists, Albert Calmette and Jōkichi Takamine, Sasges shows how their distinctive experiments with mold were remade by, and in turn helped to remake, the political economies they encountered in colonial Indochina and the Progressive Era United States, respectively. Understanding how a single technology could take on two radically different forms allows Sasges to explore how empires and capitalist enterprises combined to send mold along pathways that both reflected and transcended imperial boundaries.

Feathers, ideas, politics . . . and mold.

The final article in the March issue returns our focus to a singular event in one country, namely the 1917 Russian Revolution. In "Sounds of February, Smells of October: The Russian Revolution as Sensory Experience," **Jan Plamper** (Goldsmiths, Univ. of London) offers a novel approach to this monumental upheaval, insisting on the significance of its sensory elements—the sound of gunshots from unusual places, the smell of burnt police files, the stench of the crowded Smolny Institute where the Bolsheviks plotted their next moves. Using a wide array of diaries and memoirs, Plamper tracks in detail how people of various backgrounds expressed a new experience of time in a sensory idiom, and how they ultimately became habituated to the new sounds and sights that characterized the revolutionary moment as a world-historic event. Moving beyond the dichotomy of discourse vs. "raw" experience, Plamper, a historian of emotions, conjoins the histories of experience, the senses, and affect as an integrated, simultaneous sensory-emotional-cognitive process recognized even at the time by the avant-garde artists who were contemporaries of the Russian Revolution.

The extra room afforded by the slow(ed) production pace allows the *AHR* to supplement these articles with other material. The March issue includes a pair of History Unclassified essays. One, by **José Ragas** (Pontificia Univ. Católica de Chile), examines the multiple efforts developed by scholars to document the vast repertoire of ephemera—graffiti, signs, flags, testimonies—generated during the massive Chilean street protests of October 2019. The other, by **Andrew Denning** (Univ. of Kansas), explores the role historically themed video games have in popular understandings of history, and how they might be used by scholars in teaching and research. Denning's essay is accompanied by three reviews of video games in the popular *Assassin's Creed* series. The issue also includes six reviews of films of interest to historians, both fiction and documentary, dealing with issues of race, ethnicity, labor, and popular radicalism.

Finally, the March issue includes an innovative feature, a "review roundtable" in which seven scholars of Islamic history offer their assessments of *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, followed by a response from **Armando Salvatore** (McGill Univ.), one of the volume's editors. Subscribers will have a full three months to work their way through all this material before the June issue, so they needn't rush. **P**

Alex Lichtenstein is editor of the American Historical Review.

AHA INTRODUCES JOHN LEWIS AWARDS

Thanks to a generous donation from the Agentives Fund, the AHA is introducing two awards named in memory of John Lewis (1940–2020), the civil rights leader who represented Georgia with grace and distinction in the United States House of Representatives for 34 years. All of us, insisted Lewis, must “study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time.”

The deadline for submitting nominations for the public service award is April 1, and the deadline for the history and social justice award is May 15.

The **John Lewis Award for Public Service to the Discipline of History** will be offered annually to recognize individuals outside the ranks of professional historians who have made a significant contribution to the study, teaching, and public understanding of history, in the interest of social justice. The prize replaces the Association’s Roosevelt-Wilson Award for Public Service, which was presented to Congressman Lewis in 2006.

Nominees for the Lewis public service award may include persons who have made a significant contribution to the support and encouragement of history through their actions. Such noteworthy activity may include advocacy for historical work and the importance of history to public culture and social justice, philanthropy, support for organizations that promote history in public life, historic preservation, or other work that cultivates public awareness of history and its value to public culture.

The **John Lewis Award for History and Social Justice** will be offered annually to recognize a historian for



US House of Representatives/public domain

leadership and sustained engagement at the intersection of historical work, public culture, and social justice. Nominees, including both individuals and groups, may include professional historians whose accomplishments exemplify the value of professional historical work to public culture and social justice.

The deadline for submitting nominations for the public service award is April 1, and the deadline for the history and social justice award is May 15. To learn more about the Lewis Prizes visit historians.org/awards-and-grants/awards-and-prizes. **P**

SUSAN FERBER

GRADUATE SCHOOL IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY

One Editor's Path to Finding a Career in Other People's Books

Perhaps it should have occurred to me that I was more suited for publishing than for academia when my favorite activity in graduate seminars was preparing to give presentations on other people's books. I loved digging into all the published reviews, getting a sense of the different perspectives on the scholarship, and contextualizing the books within that scholarly literature. Spending hours in the library going through print journals and microfilm to find reviews of books—that was the kind of investigation I

craved. I remember so vividly reading reviews, trying to synthesize all the different opinions of a work, then trying to explain the new horizons its approaches opened up.

While there were memorable exceptions, too often the actual seminars fell flat for me. It wasn't the fault of my cohort; they were and are bright and fascinating (and today a few of them are even my authors). Although we had years of learning ahead of us, the greenest among us attacked the books



A love of books brought Susan Ferber to graduate school and led her into an publishing career.
Susan Yin/Unsplash

on our syllabus as if we knew firsthand how easy it was to write a book and get it published. There was a lot of posturing and trying on of academic jargon to convey ideas in a way that we thought would impress our professors and each other. By the end of each class session, it almost always felt as though there was no value in those books: that the authors had structured them badly, their research questions were inadequate, their archival source base was too thin, the analysis had failed to take into account all the strands it should, and overall they were bad reads. There must have been a reason that these books had made it onto our syllabus, if not as models for our own work, then as examples of important scholarship. Yet that wasn't how it felt after the books had been torn to shreds.

For as long as I can remember, I have loved books—loved digging into their prose, thinking about the worlds created in them. Like so many other high achievers, I had had my nose in a book since I could first read by myself. And I thought, perhaps mistakenly, that graduate school would allow me to keep my nose there professionally. Never in my undergraduate classes where we discussed and debated books had I come away feeling like books had no value or joy. However, in graduate school, all those years of research and writing seemed just to lead to works that could be demolished in two-hour seminars.

Increasingly unhappy, I thought about what kind of life might further the activities that fascinated me. A few years earlier, a career counselor had suggested I try publishing before graduate school, as if it were a preparatory job for academia. I found myself daydreaming about a life spent helping authors improve their books *before* they were published. What if, instead of deconstructing books between hard covers in seminars, I could somehow work with authors to construct them *before* they were read?

Such were my inchoate and uninformed takes about the publishing industry. Until I met with publishing professionals, I hadn't thought a great deal about market research, financial modeling, how bricks and mortar and online sales outlets drive the industry, or even competitive acquisition and the roles agents play in a segment of the industry. To me, it was about the craft of working on texts with authors, the kind of one-on-one work that I somehow imagined dominated editors' days.

In many ways, it wasn't graduate school that had best prepared me for that kind of editorial work. At my undergraduate institution, a Writing Fellows Program trained students to work with other students on developing the ideas

for their essays before they were submitted for class. I had found it deeply satisfying to give feedback to peers and to be able to help someone else do something better. Seeing my name on the cover of a book felt less important than doing this kind of collaborative work.

Collaboration—that didn't seem to be a skill much prized in grad school. I'm sure this was partially because history does not prioritize group projects, lab work, joint writing projects, or co-teaching. I missed the feeling that had been so present in my undergraduate seminars: all of us being involved in a collaborative enterprise of learning. Instead, graduate school felt like a competition, which no doubt better prepared those who succeeded to compete for scarce resources, like teaching assistantships, fellowships, academic positions, and the world of academia ahead. But it left me feeling cold and increasingly depressed, especially when the sun set before afternoon seminars ended.

I had had my nose in a book since I could first read by myself.

When I decided to leave my program, I thought a job in publishing would lead to a more satisfying intellectual and personal life. Perhaps I didn't give graduate school enough of a chance at either institution I attended; I might have grown and changed more to adapt to it; I might have developed sharper elbows, a more outspoken persona, and thicker skin. I was young, and I could have grown more *with* graduate school, rather than seeing myself as increasingly alienated from it. But that came with hindsight. It wasn't the fault of the institution; it was my inability to make myself into the model of a graduate student.

Meanwhile, on the publishing job market, my graduate training made me *less* appealing in the eyes of human resources departments. I'm sure the assumption was that I would think myself above the nitty-gritty administrative work that dominates the lives of entry-level employees in the book trade, despite my having previously held administrative jobs. HR interviewer after HR interviewer looked over my resume and asked: Why was I not teaching?

I aimed to get far away from the kinds of books I had read in grad school. I needed a fresh start, perhaps literary fiction, where I could apprentice myself to an editor and learn a new skill set and hear different voices. As I did information interviews and applied for virtually every entry-level editorial job advertised around New York and Boston, I talked with people who worked on self-help, romance, reprints,

cookbooks, textbooks, novels, commercial nonfiction, and academic books.

Then, suddenly, a stroke of luck: an editor who himself had once been a history graduate student was looking to hire an assistant. Perhaps he saw something of his own path in my resumé. Regardless of why I was hired, the opportunity enabled a tremendous turn in my professional life and the beginning of more than 20 years in history publishing.

I occasionally reflect on the mostly unhappy years of graduate school that came before and why they were valuable. They taught me that it would be okay to leave a path, one I had chosen and worked so hard to follow. They taught me that highly ranked programs at strong universities could look right on paper but in practice feel wrong for me. And they taught me that I had to find a way to be happy in my daily life and to feel that the career path I was on would be more satisfying than an academic life.

Walking away was probably the smartest decision I made about grad school.

Walking away was probably the smartest decision I made about grad school. It would have been unfair for an institution to fully train someone, to use its scarce financial resources on her, to shape an academic for the drastically shrinking market, and then for her not to want what she had been given—at least this was what I convinced myself. Better to relinquish the fellowship and allow someone else to have that opportunity, someone who would be a better fit. Had I been in grad school more recently, there would have been more open attitudes toward alternate careers. Perhaps I would have more honestly expressed my doubts about the history PhD as only a rung to climb on the tenure-track ladder.

On a daily basis now, I use the skills learned from those graduate seminars—of researching reviews, thinking through critiques, positioning a new work in a body of literature, and deciding whether the voice of the author speaks to me. There are projects I have signed hubristically, thinking I could, behind the scenes, improve the work to the point where a grad seminar would read the finished book and only see all of its glowing qualities. That, of course, will never happen. It is the nature of grad students to critique and to think that they themselves could do better. Some of the most acclaimed and prizewinning books I have edited get

dissected in seminars just the way books in my day did. But I know about the quiet work, done behind the scenes, one-on-one with the author, that went into making the final text, as well as the shortcomings of early drafts. That's between an author and an editor.

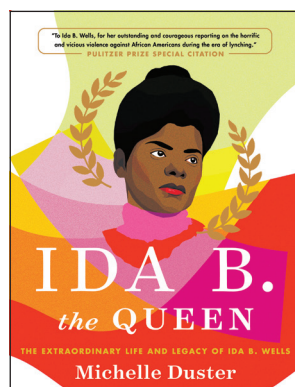
Occasionally I am invited to graduate seminars, sometimes in connection with discussion of a book on my list. It's very different to come in as an observer, no longer feeling I have to prove myself and falling short. Occasionally professors say that the first part of seminar has to be devoted to positive feedback about the book, something I wish had been true in my classrooms. In the fall of 2019, I attended a seminar that turned into a discussion about creative nonfiction techniques and different forms of writing history. It was one of the most exciting and engaging days I'd had in a long time. Since I had only just been invited that morning, I hadn't read the book in advance, but I didn't break out in a cold sweat about not finishing the reading. Instead, I could just appreciate the discussion.

The past, it has been said, is a foreign country. I love visiting so many of those countries through my manuscripts and books, seeing them through the eyes of my authors as well as those who write for other publishing houses. But my own graduate school past isn't one I feel the need to reinhabit, even as intensely gratifying as it is to visit occasionally. **P**

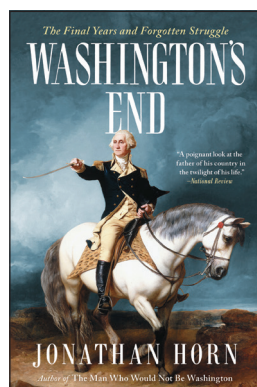
Susan Ferber is executive editor for American and world history at Oxford University Press USA and teaches at the Columbia Publishing Course.

HISTORY TITLES

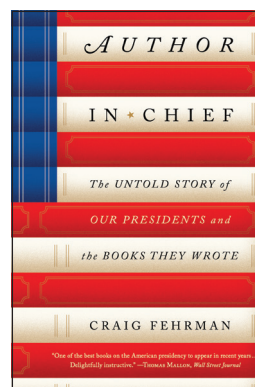
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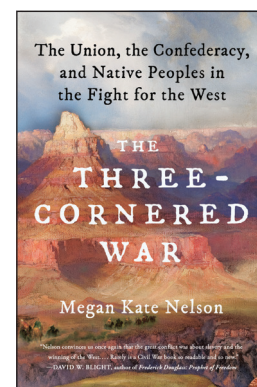
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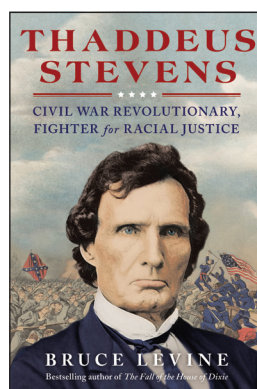
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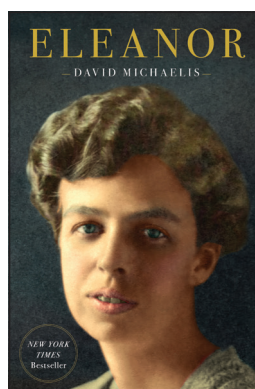
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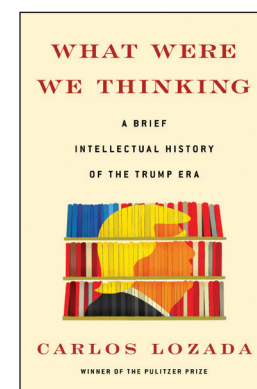
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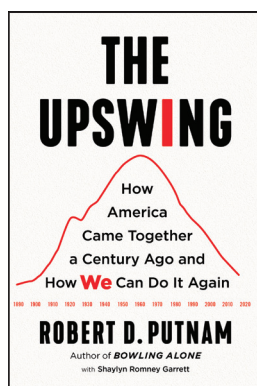
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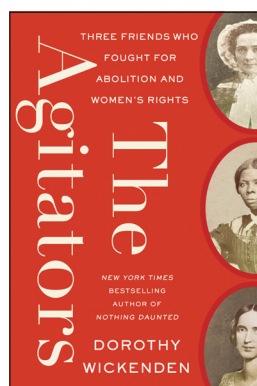
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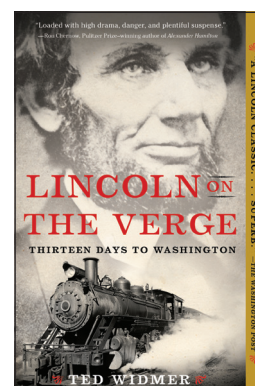
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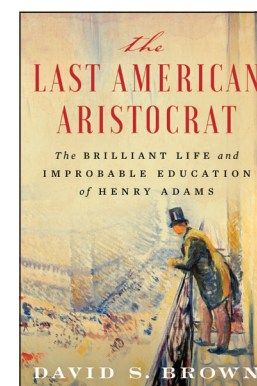
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Nancy Fitch

1946–2020

Historian of France

Nancy Fitch, a specialist in French history and a pioneer in world history pedagogy and in digital history, died on November 15, 2020, of complications from cancer. She was a beloved professor of history at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), where she had taught since 1986.

Nancy had a remarkable career; her deep intellectual curiosity and talent led her to make important contributions to several fields of history, from medieval Europe to the 20th-century world, from history pedagogy to quantitative methods. After earning her BA and MA from San Diego State University, Nancy studied with historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in France. She then completed her PhD in European history and economics at the University of California, Los Angeles, advised by Lutz Berkner, Temma Kaplan, and Robert Brenner. Her dissertation focused on the Allier region in France across a very longue durée, from the 13th to the 20th centuries. Before coming to CSUF, she taught at Hampshire College, where she developed a keen interest in experimental approaches in education.

Nancy's accomplishments spanned the categories of research, teaching, and campus and disciplinary service. With the essay as her preferred genre, she wrote on numerous topics and earned several prestigious prizes. Her early publications included "Les Petits Parisiens en Province: The Silent Revolution in the Allier" (*Journal of Family History*, 1986), which won the William Koren Jr. Prize for best article in French history. Her essay "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France" (*American Historical Review*, 1992) won the Western Association of Women Historians' Judith Lee Ridge Prize. In the late 1990s, she began innovating in what was later called digital humanities. She published "History after the Web: Teaching with Hypermedia" (*The History Teacher*, 1997) and designed a pioneering website on "The Conquest of Mexico" as part of a project developed by the AHA and funded by an NEH grant; she also gave talks in the 1980s and '90s for H-Net and several AHA annual meet-

ings on digital history. Her most recent scholarship included "Entrepreneurial Nobles or Aristocratic Serfs? A Reconsideration of Seigneurialism in Old Regime Central France" (*French Historical Studies*, 2016), which won the 2017 Nancy Lyman Roelker Award from the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference. Her final publication will be an article on World War I prisoner of war photography in a forthcoming edited collection.

Nancy was an award-winning teacher. She worked to shape the CSUF history curriculum, played a leading role in globalizing it, and developed new courses on gender, class, and ethnicity. She also created the Nancy Fitch Women's History Award Endowment to promote the study of gender history at CSUF. She was a tireless advocate for the betterment of her campus. She served in Fullerton's Academic Senate for 24 years and was a popular chair of the history department, inaugurating the department's digital history program. She also took her role as a mentor of junior faculty seriously, mentoring faculty with special sensitivity to the challenges that women and BIPOC faculty face. In 2017–18, Nancy was honored with the university's Faculty Leadership in Collegial Governance Award. As CSUF President Fram Virjee recalls, "Nancy was a force of nature." Off campus, she belonged to multiple professional societies. She co-chaired the AHA Pacific Coast Branch's program committee in 1996–97 and later served on its executive committee. She also served on committees for the Western Society for French History, the Western Association of Women's Historians, and the Social Science History Association.

Perhaps most important, Nancy was loved and admired by her students and colleagues alike, for the astonishing breadth of her knowledge and her commitment to diversity and social justice. She was a fighter with an indomitable spirit who gave generously of her time and talent to everyone who crossed her path. Nancy will be greatly missed.

Gayle Brunelle
California State University, Fullerton (emerita)

Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall
California State University, San Marcos

Photo courtesy CSUF Department of History



Paul S. Seaver

1932–2020

Historian of Britain;
AHA 50-Year Member

Paul Seaver, professor emeritus of early modern British history at Stanford University, died on August 2, 2020, at the age of 88.

Paul was born in Philadelphia in 1932. As a child, he worked on his family's dairy farm in eastern Pennsylvania while attending local public schools. His arrival at Haverford College in 1950 coincided with the early stages of the Korean War. A Quaker and committed pacifist, Seaver refused to register for the draft, which resulted in his incarceration for more than six months in federal prison.

After his release, Seaver returned to Haverford. There, working under the tutelage of Wallace MacCaffrey, Paul developed an abiding interest in the history of early modern England. He proceeded to Harvard University for graduate work, and thereafter accepted a job at Reed College. In 1964, he moved to Stanford University, where he taught for the remainder of his career.

Fascinated by the history of religion and its relationship to nascent forms of oppositional politics that emerged in the early modern period, Seaver published *The Puritan Lecture-ships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1970), which anatomized institutions established by rigorous Protestants to promote preaching (often in the teeth of official hostility). The book made crucial contributions to the politico-religious history of the period, helping to explain the cultural ligatures that transformed Puritanism into a powerful political and revolutionary force by the mid-17th century. More subtly, the study added new dimensions to historians' understanding of the social experience of religious life in London during an era of explosive growth and transformation.

This prefigured the direction of Seaver's future scholarship. Inspired by methods of social history, Seaver forged a path as a leading historian of early modern London. His work branched out to include publications on trade guilds,

apprenticeship, labor, and civic culture. These interests merged with his earlier focus on religious history in his most renowned book, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1985), which used untapped manuscript diaries to reconstruct the life and social milieu of the Puritan turner Nehemiah Wallington. This remarkable microhistory provided a window into the existence of an ordinary urban tradesman and his family, allowing readers to access a realm of plebeian life that had been largely invisible to posterity, and it earned Seaver the British Council Prize in the Humanities for 1986. Seaver received numerous other awards and accolades for his work, including election as a fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Paul's brilliance as a scholar was matched by an unwavering devotion to his students. His understated but inspiring pedagogical style and his wisdom as an adviser shaped the lives of countless Stanford undergraduates and graduate students. From the late 1960s, he was one of the chief stewards of Stanford's regime of general humanities education, first as director of successive Western civilization programs, and afterward (when spirited intellectual debate and protest led to abandonment of this model) as manager of the delicate process of transforming first-year humanities education to make way for a more culturally inclusive curriculum. Recognition of his pedagogical contribution came in the form of successive university teaching awards.

Paul's impact, however, extended far beyond his role as a teacher and administrator. His life experience meant that he served as an exemplar and counselor for many young people during the upheavals of the Vietnam War, the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, and the decades that followed. For all of Paul's eminence as a scholar, mentor, and teacher, it is his example as a human being that commands the most attention—all who knew him will attest to his boundless decency, kindness, and integrity.

Paul is survived by his wife Kirsten, his daughter Hannah, and his son David. His parting leaves a profound sense of loss and sorrow among his family, colleagues, and friends.

David Como
Stanford University

Photo courtesy Seaver family



Howard P. Segal

1948–2020

Historian of Technology;
AHA 50-Year Member

Howard P. Segal, a professor of history at the University of Maine, died on November 9, 2020, in Orono, Maine.

Born and raised in Philadelphia in a liberal, middle-class Jewish household, Segal attended Franklin and Marshall University during the turbulent 1960s, where he developed a reputation as a campus leader. As a graduate student at Princeton University, Segal wrote a dissertation on “technological utopians,” 34 Americans from 1810 onward who shared a similar vision of what the nation could be. What separated his subjects’ singular vision from other utopians was their various uses of technologies to overcome otherwise imposing limitations or social inequities. He later published his revised dissertation as *Technological Utopianism in American Culture* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985).

Segal’s dissertation foreshadowed his life’s work. Utopias attracted him because they suggested a perfectibility that he wanted to help make true. His work labored to make institutions, governments, and other social agencies continually strive to approach that noble goal. When they inevitably did not, Segal chided, derided, and even lambasted them and the officials who set their wayward courses.

At the heart of almost everything that Segal wrote sat technology—not as a monolith, but rather a category, a collection of awesome powers that could be used for good or evil. As he spelled out in *Future Imperfect: The Mixed Blessings of Technology in America* (Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1994), it was expressly because technology often had unintended consequences that Segal so cherished his utopian-inspiring institutions. Their representatives could be entrusted to redress wrongs, alter course, and rein in unexpected ramifications that could cause harm.

After earning his PhD in the mid-1970s, Segal embraced the difficult life of an itinerant scholar, accepting term-limited appointments at Franklin and Marshall, the University of Cincinnati, and Dalhousie University. He spent five years in

a permanent position in the humanities department of the University of Michigan’s engineering college before the department closed. Segal took temporary posts at Eastern Michigan University and Harvard University before landing a permanent position at the University of Maine in 1986. He taught there for the remainder of his life, and it is there that he met his spouse Deborah Rogers, an English professor. Together they raised two children, Rick and Raechel.

At Maine, Segal served two terms as a Byrd & Byrd Professor and 30 years as a member of the faculty senate. He joined historical and other boards, wrote a recurring column for the *Bangor Daily News*, published over 100 opinion pieces for newspapers in the United States and United Kingdom, and was a site visitor for Phi Beta Kappa, an organization especially dear to his heart. He threw himself into the work of historical organizations, seeing their activities as akin to his own. He never missed an opportunity to present his work at professional meetings—always with humor that sometimes bordered on absurdist—and to engage others at their sessions. He regularly served on editorial boards and never missed a chance to review new work. While he sometimes loved the institutions more than he felt they appreciated him, Segal never diminished his enthusiasm for them, and he remained steadfast in his support. To Segal, history and historical organizations were instrumental in fighting the good fight.

Segal leaves behind eight books and numerous articles. All confront some aspect of technological innovation, including *Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford’s Village Industries* (Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2005), and most dissect technological visions that his subjects embraced. He also co-authored the textbook *Technology in America: A Brief History*, first published in 1989 and now in its third edition. At the time of his death, Segal was working on two projects. The first was a history of the University of Maine, an institution he loved, co-authored with Rogers. The second was a history of the curiously American idea of “techno-fixes,” where technological solutions to the nation’s problems were defined and evaluated by a cadre of members of the technological elite. Segal did not damn them their conceit. He demanded instead seats at the table for historians and other humanists.

Alan I Marcus
Mississippi State University

Photo courtesy University of Maine

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LEARNING TOOLS

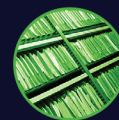
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NEW JERSEY

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FAHAD AHMAD BISHARA

THE *FATEH AL-KHAYR*

I was probably a bit too young to appreciate it when it happened. In 1994, when I was roughly 11 years old, my family learned that the *Fateh Al-Khayr*, a dhow (a lateen-sailed vessel unique to the Indian Ocean) that my grandfather had captained in his early years, was found in a harbor in the United Arab Emirates. The Kuwaiti government had plans to purchase it and refurbish it for display to the public. That summer—hot, like every summer in Kuwait—I went to the old shipyard with my father and spent an afternoon exploring the dhow. I remember the smell of the teak (it has a very distinct smell) and how big the thing felt. I also was incredibly bored by all of it, as my father, my grandfather, and a shipwright droned on and on about the thing, using terminology that I could hardly understand, let alone comprehend.

It was only later in my life, well after graduate school, that I could see the tension crammed into that day and onto the deck of that dhow. I came to understand that the *Fateh* was in the process of being refurbished, not from one state of operation to another, but from workhorse to national icon. After Iraqi troops withdrew from Kuwait, the search for authentic artifacts representing an autonomous, sovereign past became a matter of political urgency. That ship was becoming a canvas onto which narratives of a national past could be inscribed—all the more important given that it was the only pre-oil-era dhow left after the Gulf War of 1990.

And yet those national aspirations sat uneasily on the dhow itself, which had spent its life at sea, and whose planks quite literally smelled of someplace else (teak came from the Malabar coast of India); it drew its crew, too, from around the coasts of Arabia and Iran. Its history was scattered across the many coasts of the Indian Ocean world. The transnational history of the dhow as a historical object thus



sat in tension with its future as an artifact of the nation; in stripping the dhow of its maritime history, the state reinvented it as an artifact through which Kuwaitis could become tourists to their own past.

Nested within these tensions is precisely the challenge the dhow poses to the historian. Rather than observe it from afar and project narratives onto it, dhows like the *Fateh* invite us to sit on their decks and to read from there: to unpack the lexicons, conceptual frameworks, and historical imaginaries of their actors, and to see the world from the deck of the dhow. That means casting behind the narrative of the inevitable emergence of an autonomous nation, and reading a history that unfolds along a much broader canvas—along routes that the *Fateh* and its captains plied, year after year.

Looking back at that moment under the blistering Kuwaiti summer sun—I was definitely too young to have appreciated it when it happened. **P**

Fahad Ahmad Bishara is associate professor of history and the Rouhollah Ramazani Associate Professor of Arabian Peninsula and Gulf Studies at the University of Virginia. He tweets @TheNakhoda.

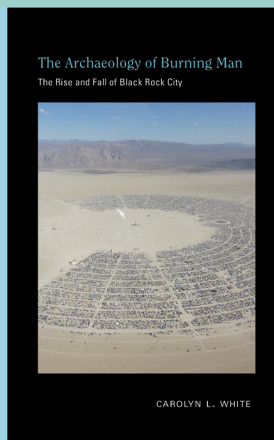
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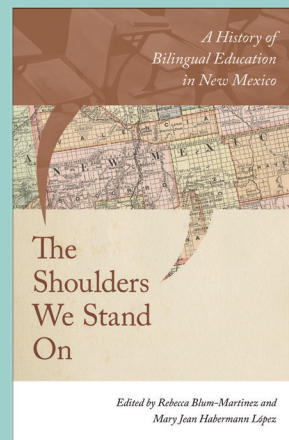


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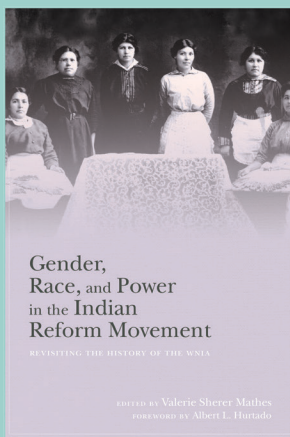


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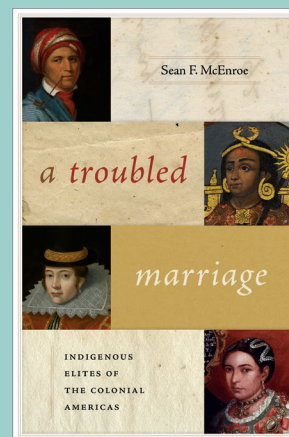
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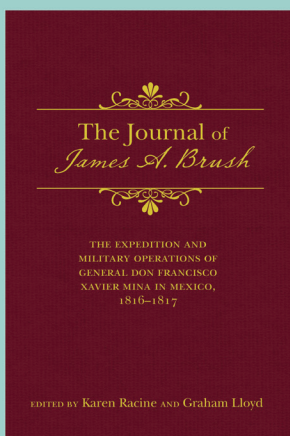
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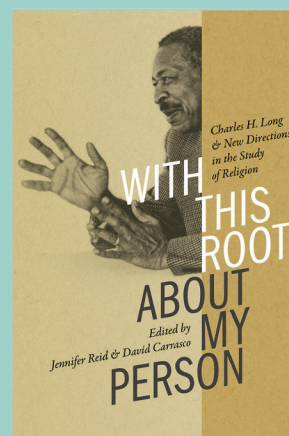
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